



Living in the Victory God Gives (2 Sam 11-12)

Notes: Week Six

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.
This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between
the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

New American Commentary¹

6. The Lord Judges David

Chapter [11](#) is a watershed in the biblical writer's presentation of David's life. Up to this point, David has been portrayed as the ideal servant of the Lord, scrupulously obedient to every point of the law and zealous in his execution of each command. David's obedience resulted in the fulfillment of Torah promises and an outpouring of blessing on Israel beyond any previously known. Perhaps the most significant of the Torah promises fulfilled through David was the establishment of a dynastic covenant with messianic and eschatological implications (cf. [Gen 49:10](#); [Num 24:17](#)).

In this section David becomes for a moment a rebel against the Lord's covenant, with devastating consequences. His twin sins of adultery and murder rent the tapestry of blessing woven so carefully in the previous narratives. Although David repented of the sins he had committed, irreparable damage had been done; the dynastic covenant promises graciously given to David remained, but the Torah blessings resulting from obedience vanished. In their place David began to experience the stern curses of the Torah, including loss of family (cf. [Deut 28:18](#)) and even exile (cf. [Deut 28:64-67](#)). In all of this David extended the metaphorical comparison between his life and the life of Israel: even as David lost his prestige and homeland through sin, so also would the nation.

If David's sin with its dread consequences is a metaphor of judgment for the nation of Israel through the exilic period, it is also a metaphor of hope. As chap. [20](#) concludes, David has returned to the environs of Jerusalem and is successfully engaged in the arduous task of rebuilding a nation. The Lord graciously brought David back from exile east of the Jordan, and the Lord would graciously bring Israel back to Jerusalem from its Babylonian exile.

(1) David Does Evil in the Lord's Sight [11:1-27](#)

[11:1](#) David had met the challenge of the Ammonite rebellion following Nahash's death (cf. [10:6-14](#)), but he had not eliminated the Ammonite threat of continued challenges to his authority. In their previous fight with Israel's army the Ammonites had merely retreated behind the protective walls of Rabbah and remained essentially unscathed. The proximity of Ammon to the tribal territories of Gad and Manasseh meant that David could not ignore this menacing neighbor; another, more focused military effort against them would be necessary.

1. Robert D. Bergen, *New American Commentary – Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 360-377.

Consequently, the following “spring, at the time when the delegation had gone forth [NIV, “when kings go off to war”], David sent Joab out” to Rabbah Ammon a second time. David’s timing for the military campaign was important for two reasons. First, by picking the anniversary date of the humiliation of the Israelite envoy sent to convey condolences for Nahash’s death (cf. [10:2](#)), David left no doubt about the reason for this attack on Rabbah. Second, late spring was the ideal time to conduct foreign military campaigns because of improved weather conditions and the fact that the armies could be fed from the wheat and barley ripening in Ammonite fields. For the campaign David made Joab his agent to command both “the king’s men”—perhaps the Kerethites and Pelethites—“and the whole Israelite army.”

The Israelites were eminently successful in the first phase of their campaign; “they destroyed the Ammonites” who chose to stand their ground and defend their city. In the second phase of Israel’s efforts, the army “besieged Rabbah”; this process could easily take months or even years (cf. [2 Kgs 25:1–3](#))—a fact of some relevance for the present narrative.

David “remained in Jerusalem” during all but the final phase of this campaign (cf. [13:29–30](#)). The king’s absence from the battlefield at this time should not be understood as dereliction of duty. David had previously remained in Jerusalem when the Ammonites were attacked (cf. [10:7](#)). Furthermore, at some point in David’s military career—quite possibly prior to the events of this passage—David’s men had pleaded with him to avoid an active role in military campaigns (cf. [21:17](#)) out of concern for the king’s safety and the best interests of the nation.

[11:2–5](#) “One evening” (v. [2](#)) during this period, David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace.” The preferred portion of an Israelite house on warm evenings was the sturdy flat roof (cf. [1 Sam 9:25](#)), where one might relax in the comparative comfort of cool breezes.

David’s house probably was located on the highest ground within the old Jebusite fortress, and from his rooftop he would have had a commanding view of the city. From that vantage point, David “saw a woman bathing.” Since no Israelite house had running water at that time, bathing often may have been performed privately, in the enclosed courtyard that was a part of many Israelite houses; alternatively, it may have been done openly near the city’s public water source. There is no indication in the text that the woman deliberately positioned herself so as to entice David.

David noticed that “the woman was very beautiful,” and his desires were aroused. Accordingly, he “sent someone to find out about her” (v. [3](#); cp. [1 Sam 17:55–58](#)). The messenger reported that the woman was “Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite”; thus, she was the daughter of one of David’s best fighters (cf. [23:34](#)), the granddaughter of his most trusted counselor (cf. [16:23](#); [23:34](#)), and the wife of one of his inner circle of honored soldiers (cf. [23:39](#)). Since David was properly informed of this latter fact, for him to pursue Bathsheba further was already to commit adultery with her in his heart (cf. [Matt 5:28](#)).

Notwithstanding the Torah’s prohibition (cf. [Exod 20:14](#); [Lev 18:20](#); [Deut 5:18](#)) and the fact that the penalty for adultery was death (cf. [Lev 20:10](#); [Deut 22:22](#)), “David sent messengers to get her” (v. [4](#)). Bathsheba “came to him,” perhaps because she was naive or simply lacked the will to resist the powerful king’s request, or perhaps because she desired to be unfaithful to her husband. The writer’s omission of an explicit motive behind Bathsheba’s action reinforces the conviction that this story is not so much about Bathsheba’s actions but David’s. David “slept with her,” an idiomatic Hebrew expression indicating that he engaged in sexual intercourse with her. David’s sinful encounter with Bathsheba occurred “after she had purified herself from her uncleanness” (cf. [Lev 15:19](#)), that is, during the part of her monthly cycle when she was not menstruating and thus was more likely to conceive, which she did. When she had become aware of the bodily changes that accompanied the pregnancy, Bathsheba sent someone to David informing him of her situation.

[11:6–9](#) Ever resourceful in adversity, David had a scheme for handling the present crisis. The plan was simple and essentially foolproof: bring Uriah back to Jerusalem temporarily, have him spend one intimate night with his wife, and then send him back to Rabbah. Approximately nine months later Bathsheba would have her child, Uriah would be ecstatic, and David would possess total deniability—no one, not even the servant who had brought Bathsheba to David, could prove that David fathered the child. With this plan in mind, David ordered Joab to “send me Uriah the Hittite,” which he did.

With the first part of the plan successfully implemented, David initiated the second phase. Uriah, perhaps breathless from the hasty return to Jerusalem in response to the royal summons, entered the king’s presence. Not knowing what urgent matter had necessitated this forty-plus-mile trip to Jerusalem, Uriah might have been somewhat surprised to find that the king merely wanted to know “how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how the war was going” (v. [7](#)). Such comparatively trivial information could have been acquired from any of the runners who kept David informed of the battle’s progress—it certainly did not need to come from one of the Thirty (cf. [23:39](#)).

In an effort to appear generous and appreciative of Uriah’s efforts and information, David directed Uriah to “go down to your house and wash your feet” (v. [8](#)). David’s reference to footwashing was a suggestion that he receive gracious domestic hospitality (cf. [Gen 18:4](#); [19:2](#); [24:32](#); [43:24](#)) from his wife; implicitly it was an order to spend a night of marital intimacy with Bathsheba. To encourage the celebrative moment in the household, David sent “a gift”—probably of food and wine—to Uriah’s residence. However, neither David’s directive nor his gift achieved their intended purpose, for Uriah “did not go down to his house” (v. [9](#)).

Uriah’s refusal to have sexual contact with his wife at this time was clearly an expression of his devotion to the Lord: all sanctioned military activity was a form of service to the Lord, and it required the Lord’s blessing for success. In order to maximize the probability of receiving that blessing in military endeavors, David seems to have required soldiers carrying out military assignments to keep themselves in a state of ritual purity, which necessarily meant refraining from all sexual contact (cf. [1 Sam 21:5](#); [Exod 19:15](#)). If Uriah had had sexual relations with Bathsheba, he would have rendered himself temporarily unfit for military service (cf. [Lev 15:18](#)) and thus unfit for service to the Lord.

[11:10–13](#) When David learned that “Uriah did not go home” (v. [10](#)), he had the soldier brought before him and plied him with leading questions: Had he not “just come from a distance” that would have required him to be absent from his wife for a period of time? Why then did he not “go home?” David’s questions were a thinly veiled attack on Uriah’s virility designed to pressure him into temporarily setting aside larger commitments.

Undaunted by the king’s wounding words, Uriah explained his action as the expression of solidarity with both the Lord and his comrades in arms. His comrades—men with equally strong affections for their wives—were forced to be separated from their families by being encamped “in the fields.” On oath Uriah declared he would not break faith with the others and afford himself the luxury of spending the evening with his wife.

In growing desperation David ordered Uriah to spend one more day in Jerusalem so that the king could try a different strategy. This time David would employ a scandalous but uncomplicated tactic: the king would make Uriah drunk, hoping that his servant would then sacrifice principle for baser instincts. David could have learned this technique, ironically enough, from a study of the Torah’s account of the origins of the Ammonites (cf. [Gen 19:30–38](#)), the very people Uriah was now fighting.

“At David’s invitation” (v. [13](#)) on two consecutive evenings (cf. v. [12](#)), therefore, Uriah “ate and drank” at the royal table and the king succeeded in making him drunk. Despite his chemically impaired reasoning, however, Uriah again refused to compromise his values. Instead of going home to sleep with Bathsheba, he spent the night among his master’s servants.”

[11:14–15](#) All lesser measures having failed, David was now confronted with the horrible choice of either admitting that he committed a capital crime, thereby condemning himself to death, or ordering the death of one of his most valuable soldiers. Either way, someone would have to die, and since David was unwilling to order his own death, that someone was Uriah.

“The morning” (v. [14](#)) after what must have been one of the most difficult nights in David’s life, the king “wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah.” Though ostraca were sometimes used for official military correspondence, undoubtedly the letter that Uriah carried was either parchment or papyrus, sealed with the royal signet ring so that its contents would have been unknown to anyone but Joab. Uriah was unwittingly carrying his own death warrant.

[11:16–21](#) Joab complied with his uncle’s orders, though he must surely have questioned them. Once the Israelite troops had sealed off Ammon by preventing all traffic in or out of the city, direct attacks against Rabbah’s walls would have been unnecessary, since it was safer to wait until the people inside starved or voluntarily surrendered. Except for occasional desperate attacks from Ammonite forces venturing out of the city gate to try to break the siege or perhaps mercenary forces other than Arameans (cf. [10:19](#)) hired by the besieged, the Israelite forces had little to fear.

Joab obediently ordered Uriah to attack the city at its strongest point—probably near the city gate. Exactly as David had hoped, Uriah was killed, but along with him several other of David’s soldiers died needlessly.

As part of the ongoing task of keeping the king informed of the military operation’s progress, “Joab sent David a full account of the battle” (v. [18](#)). The news was not particularly good on this occasion, so Joab provided the messenger with a set of additional—albeit oblique—instructions. Whether the comparatively lengthy set of guidelines (fifty-three words, Joab’s second-longest speech) was intended to be part of the cover-up or whether Joab genuinely feared some reprisal from the king cannot be discerned from the text. At any rate, Joab let the messenger know it was important to inform David that his “servant Uriah the Hittite is dead” (v. [21](#)).

[11:22–25](#) The messenger returned to Jerusalem with his report. The reader learns the tragic details of Uriah’s death only as they are relayed to King David here. David’s response was pastoral in tone as he instructed the messenger “to encourage Joab” (v. [25](#)). David waxed philosophical as he quoted from an ancient proverb to remind Joab that war’s unpredictable appetite sometimes consumes a nation’s best men. Uriah’s death was lamentable, but it must not cause the general to lose sight of the larger objective: Joab should “press the attack against the city and destroy it.”

[11:26–27](#) Commonly practiced Old Testament mourning customs included weeping (Hb. *bākā*; cf. [Jer 22:10](#); [Ezek 24:17](#); [Joel 1:8](#); [Zech 12:10](#)); wailing—that is, expressing a mournful, high-pitched cry (*’ābal*; [Jer 6:26](#)); rolling in dust (cf. [Ezek 27:30](#)); modifying one’s diet for a period of time ([Jer 16:5](#); [Ezek 24:17](#)); and modifying one’s garb, either putting on sackcloth or, in the case of a woman who lost her spouse, wearing garments that identified her as a widow ([Gen 38:14](#); [Jer 6:26](#); [49:3](#)).

The official mourning period for an individual might have varied in duration, depending on the social status of the deceased: Aaron and Moses were officially mourned for one cycle of the moon (cf. [Num 20:29](#); [Deut 34:8](#)); Uriah’s mourning period would not have exceeded that.

Though David's actions here toward Bathsheba have parallels with his treatment of Abigail (cf. [1 Sam 25:39–42](#)), similar policies and motivations may distinguish the two. As perhaps in the case of Abigail, David may have been acting as a royal, surrogate kinsman-redeemer (Hb. *gō'ēl*). David might have claimed he was taking the *gō'ēl* responsibility on himself since Uriah was a foreigner who had no near kinsman living in Israel. As such, David would have assumed the lifelong responsibility of caring for the needs of Uriah's widow and was obligated to father a child in order to raise up an offspring to preserve the family line of the deceased (cf. [Gen 38:8](#); [Deut 25:5–6](#); [Ruth 4:5](#)). Such a pretext would have made David's actions toward Bathsheba following Uriah's death seem truly noble and would have accounted nicely for the birth of the son.

No matter how honorable and magnanimous David's actions may have appeared to some, however, what David had done “was evil in the eyes of Yahweh” [NIV, “displeased the LORD”]. The Lord had looked at David's heart (cf. [1 Sam 16:7](#)) and seen the king's act for the despicable deed it was. The closest parallel to the writer's description of the Lord's reaction to David's behavior is found in the Torah's expression of the Lord's response to Onan's sexual misconduct (cf. [Gen 38:10](#)). Onan died for his misbehavior; and David's penalty—though not yet revealed by the writer—could be expected to be equally severe.

(2) Nathan Announces the Lord's Judgment and Forgiveness [12:1–14](#)

Nathan's divinely inspired pronouncement here tempers, though does not nullify, the incredible blessings promised to David and his dynastic house in chap. [7](#). David had sinned egregiously, and the Lord must judge it. The Lord's judgment is duly harsh yet merciful: David had committed a sin whose only stated penalty was death (cf. [Lev 20:10](#); [Deut 22:22](#)), yet the Lord sovereignly promised that the king would not die.

The metaphorical comparison between the lives of David and Israel, so firmly established prior to this point, is extended in this incident. Israel had played the harlot with foreign gods, thereby committing a sin for which the Torah decreed death (cf. [Deut 7:25–26](#)). Yet after judging them and causing them to sacrifice much of the blessing that had been theirs, Yahweh the Merciful permitted them to live.

[12:1–4](#) As on previous occasions (cf. [1 Sam 16:12–13](#); [2 Sam 7:4–17](#)), when the Lord made a destiny-shaping pronouncement concerning David's life, he conveyed it through a prophet. In this instance “the LORD sent Nathan to David” (v. [1](#)), apparently on the day that Bathsheba gave birth to the baby (cf. vv. [14](#), [18](#)).

Nathan conveyed the divine judgment against the king with superlative communicative skill. He began with a parable (*māšāl*), in this case a simple, immediately comprehensible narrative designed to convey a truth that far exceeded its surface meaning. Such stories, not unlike political cartoons today, permitted persons of lesser social power to render judgment against the most powerful members of society. Jotham had previously used one to condemn Abimelech's actions (cf. [Judg 9:6–15](#)) and judge a city; Ezekiel later used one to convey words of harsh judgment against Israel (cf. [Ezek 17:2–10](#)).

Nathan's story was about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man's wealth included “a very large number of sheep and cattle” (v. [2](#)), suggesting that he—like David—was a shepherd. The poor man's penury was reflected in his lack of livestock; he “had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought” (v. [3](#)). What the poor man lacked in material wealth he made up for in compassion. Truly the lamb was loved “like a daughter.” The prophet's comparison of the poor man's ewe to a “daughter” (Hb. *bat*) who slept (Hb. *šākab*) in a man's arms creates a not-so-subtle lexical linkage between the beloved lamb and Bathsheba (Hb. *bat-šeba'*), who previously was portrayed as sleeping (Hb. *šākab*; v. [4](#)) in David's arms.

When the rich man in Nathan's story had a guest journey to his residence, he followed the Mediterranean rules of hospitality by preparing a sumptuous meal for the visitor (cf. [Gen 18:5–8](#); [19:3](#)). Yet when the rich man did so, he violated protocol and propriety (as well as the Torah) by using a stolen lamb for the purpose rather than his own.

[12:5–6](#) David, acting in his role as presiding judge in Israel's royal court of justice, interrupted the narrative at this point to pronounce judgment against the sinful party. Enraged, David first expressed his instinctive feelings—"the man who did this deserves to die"—and then rendered a verdict duly prescribed by the Torah (cf. [Exod 22:1](#))—"he must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity" (v. [6](#)). Because of the high-handed and cruel nature of the rich man's actions, the full Torah penalty would be imposed. David's own Torah-violating behavior had not robbed him of his commitment to impose the requirements of the Torah on others!

[12:7–10](#) Of course, when David condemned the rich man's sin, he also condemned himself, as Nathan emphatically declared. Then without waiting for a response from the stunned king, he launched into a stern judgment oracle consisting of three sections: first, a background section (vv. [7–8](#)), where the Lord described the favorable treatment David had been accorded over the years; second, an enumeration of David's offenses, both Godward and manward (v. [9](#)); and finally, a declaration of the penalties associated with David's offense (vv. [10–12](#)).

The section begins with a lengthy oracle-initiation formula employed only rarely in Scripture. By crediting the words to "the LORD the God of Israel," Nathan was establishing the judgment in a covenantal context. From Nathan's perspective, David had violated the sacred covenant established at Sinai between the Lord and the sons of Israel, of which David was one.

Before pronouncing sentence against the king, the Lord through his spokesman enumerated a list of benevolent actions he had performed on David's behalf. These undeserved blessings had provided David with (1) position—"I anointed you king over Israel"; (2) protection—"I delivered you from the hand of Saul"; (3) possessions—"I gave your master's house to you" (v. [8](#)); (4) symbols of royal prestige and privilege—"your master's wives"; and (5) control over "the house of Israel and Judah."

From this list the reader learns for the first time that when David assumed kingship over all Israel, he took control of at least that portion of Saul's possessions that were acquired as a result of his kingship. David also gained exclusive rights to Saul's harem. This was a dramatic symbol of David's uncontested kingship, since to have rights over these women signified the acquisition of privileges previously reserved for Saul (cf. [16:21–22](#)).

Then, in a verse that may be viewed as a key—a turning point—in the structure of 2 Samuel, the Lord furthermore suggested that David had not yet plumbed the depths of God's generosity in his behalf. After providing a relational context describing how David had been so richly blessed, the Lord made explicit the exact nature of the offenses committed. Fundamentally, David had rejected the terms of the relational framework that had bound the king to his God: David "had shown contempt for [NIV, "despise"] the word of the LORD by doing what is evil" (v. [9](#)) in the Lord's eyes. David had made a mockery of the Ten Commandments, the central tenets of the Lord's covenantal relationship with Israel, by committing the dual sins of murder and adultery.

As is regularly the case with sin, David's transgression had not only violated his relationship with God (cf. [Ps 51:4](#) [[Hb. 51:6](#)]), but it also had ravaged human relationships as well. When David sinned against the Lord by violating the covenant, he also had sinned against both a man and a woman: he "struck down Uriah the Hittite and took his wife" as his own, besides causing the deaths of the soldiers who had accompanied Uriah on his fateful mission.

David might have been tempted to claim that it was the Ammonites, not he, who killed Uriah; but the Lord shredded that defense by ruling that David killed “Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites.” The hand of David that had penned the murderous order would bear responsibility for thrusting Uriah in the path of a deadly Ammonite weapon.

Uriah had died because of David’s sin, but God decreed that death would enter David’s life as well: “the sword will never depart from your house” (v. [10](#)). This dark judgment presages fatal violence within David’s family and can be seen as the literary motivation for chaps. [13–19](#) as well as [1 Kings 1–2](#). All told, four of David’s sons would experience premature death—an unnamed son (cf. [12:18](#)), Amnon (cf. [13:29](#)), Absalom (cf. [18:14–15](#)), and Adonijah (cf. [1 Kgs 2:25](#)). Traditional Jewish and Christian interpretation of this passage has correlated the death of the four sons to be the “fourfold” of v. [6](#). To remove all doubt about why this would occur, Yahweh restated the fundamental cause: “You despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.”

In the restatement of David’s offenses, the Lord personalized the king’s transgression against the deity. David had not merely despised the Lord’s word; he had despised the Lord himself. The Lord and his Word were inseparable: to neglect or offend the word of the Torah—that is, the word of the Lord—was to neglect or offend the Lord. The writer’s effortless equation of God with the written covenant in vv. [9–10](#) reflects an acceptance of Scripture as truly divine (cf. [2 Tim 3:16](#); [2 Pet 1:21](#)).

[12:11–12](#) A second wave of judgments were pronounced against David in v. [11](#) as Nathan declared what else “the LORD says.” In this section judgment was proclaimed against David, not his house: “Out of your own household I am going to bring evil [NIV, “calamity”] upon you.” In a striking display of the Torah concept of *lex talionis* (cf. [Exod 21:24](#); [Lev 24:20](#); [Deut 19:21](#)), David’s sexual sins against another would give rise to sexual sins committed by another against David: “I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives.”

When David pronounced judgment against the wicked rich man in Nathan’s story, he had dictated that the Torah penalty be meted out against the man. In keeping with the principle of a penalty that compensatorily exceeded the original act, the Lord performs a similar magnification: David “did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel” (v. [12](#)).

[12:13–14](#) In a remarkable display of humility and contrition, David confessed his guilt in the single most significant dimension of his sinful act: “I have sinned against the LORD” (v. [13](#); cf. [Ps 51:4](#) [[Hb. v. 6](#)]). David had certainly also sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, and unnamed soldiers; but those offenses were derivative and secondary in nature. Had David not rebelled against the Lord’s Word, these persons would not have been murdered or abused.

David’s confession came with immediacy, without denial, and without excuse; the Lord’s forgiveness was equally direct and unrestrained. It also was without cost: forgiveness was granted the king without requiring him first to make animal sacrifices or give great gifts to the Lord. In an unadorned fashion Nathan responded to David by declaring that “the LORD has taken away your sin.”

The Lord’s forgiveness was also accompanied by great mercy. The Torah declared that all murderers and adulterers must die (cf. [Gen 9:6](#); [Exod 21:12](#); [Lev 20:10](#); [24:17](#); [Deut 22:22](#)); nevertheless, in what Baldwin terms “the turning-point in the life of David,” the Lord declared that David was “not going to die.” Why did the Lord choose not to enforce the unambiguous requirements of the Sinai covenant? There can be but one answer: because he is “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin” ([Exod 34:7](#)). David lived for the same reason that the nation of Israel would live beyond its sin (cf. [Deut 32:26–27](#); [Hos 11:8](#)).

The Lord forgave David and granted him the unmerited gift of life, but he did not remove all consequences resulting from David's sin. David's sin had "showed utter contempt for the LORD" (v. [14](#); NIV, "made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt") and is lexically linked to the sin of Hophni and Phinehas (cf. [1 Sam 2:17](#)). God slew Eli's sons for showing contempt (Hb. *nā'as*) for the Lord's offering, and in the case of David's contempt, his son would die.

(3) The Lord Expresses Judgment and Forgiveness [12:15-25](#)

[12:15-17](#) After making the grim pronouncement in the king's presence, Nathan went home. To emphasize the immediacy of God's judgment, the writer reports no intervening events between Nathan's departure from the royal court and the time when "the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David" (v. [15](#)). The sober reality that this child was the product of a sinful union is highlighted by the fact that his mother was referred to as "Uriah's wife." Immediately the newborn son "became ill."

David the man of prayer (cf. [Ps 109:4](#)) "pleaded with God for the child" (v. [16](#)). David's efforts on behalf of his beloved infant were intense, fueled both by a father's natural compassion for a sick child and by a profound confidence in God's mercy. Without hesitation the king "fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground." David's self-denial and self-abasement probably should be interpreted as a demonstration of his remorse for the sins he had committed, carried out in an effort to gain a reprieve for his son. Alternatively, they may have been an effort to demonstrate to God that the child's recovery was more important to him than either food, comfort, or pride. David persisted in his actions in spite of the efforts of "the elders of his household" (v. [17](#))—probably his royal counselors, who "stood beside him to get him up from the ground."

[12:18-19](#) "On the seventh day" (v. [18](#))—that is, when the child was seven days old—he "died." The fact that the child died on the seventh day of his life is of great significance when considered in light of the Torah. Sons were not to receive circumcision, the physical sign of identification with the Lord's covenant, until the eighth day of their life (cf. [Lev 12:3](#); also [Luke 1:59](#); [2:21](#); [Phil 3:5](#)). David's son was conceived as a result of David's contempt for the Lord's covenant (cf. v. [9](#)), so it was painfully fitting that the child should be permanently excluded from Israel's covenant community (cf. [Gen 17:14](#)). This seventh-day death may also explain why the child is never referred to by name; perhaps the child never received a name, since under normal circumstances naming might not occur until after the child received the covenant sign (cf. [Luke 1:59-62](#)).

David had inflicted so much pain on himself during the time of the child's illness that his "servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead." They feared that when he learned that his efforts to win a reprieve for his son had failed, "he may do something desperate" (Hb. *rā'ah*; lit., "evil, harm").

The servants' fears, however, proved unjustified. David, ever the astute interpreter of others' actions (cf. [1 Sam 20:1-3](#)), "realized the child was dead" (v. [18](#)) when he "noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves." His conclusion was confirmed when he asked the servants a direct question.

[12:20-23](#) David surprised everyone, however, by his reaction to the news. Instead of doing something reckless and injurious, David ended his humiliation before the Lord and prepared to worship. Even as David's unnamed son was being prepared for burial, David was grooming himself for a new life. And this new life would begin exactly where the king's earlier life had found its success and strength, in the presence of the Lord.

In a manner appropriate for a priest (cf. [Exod 30:20](#); cf. [Ps 110:4](#)) David first washed himself and then “went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.” In losing his son, David sought more than ever to gain a deeper relationship with his Heavenly Father. It is significant that David did not break his fast until after he had worshiped God; David’s hunger for a right relationship with God exceeded his desire for culinary delights.

David’s servants were mystified by the king’s actions and boldly asked him why he was “acting this way” (v. [21](#)). Whereas others rolled in the dust when a family member died, David had chosen to “get up”; though others might fast (cf. [Ezra 10:6](#)), David ate.

David, whose life found its focus and fundamental motivations in God, explained his actions theologically. He knew that Yahweh was a God of great compassion and mercy (cf. [Exod 34:6](#)) who sometimes relented from executing harsh—but just—judgments; therefore, it was possible that the Lord would “let the child live” (v. [22](#)). In order to encourage God to spare the child’s life, therefore, the king had “fasted and wept” (v. [22](#)). However, the child’s life expired.

God had acted, and the child was “dead” (v. [23](#)), never to be brought “back again.” The child’s death did not mean that God was unjust or unloving; on the contrary, it meant that the divine word spoken through the prophet was trustworthy (cf. v. [14](#))—a fact that must have provided a measure of comfort to the king. The Lord’s word had not changed, and the Lord himself had not changed; divine grace was just as real after the death as it had been before. Neither David’s sin nor the child’s death had changed God’s nature. Therefore, now that the child was gone David could and must get on with his life. Though David was now bereft of his son, the separation would be only temporary. There is to be heard a note of consolation in David’s words “I will go to him.”

[12:24–25](#) David accepted these twin realities of God’s grace and judgment and found himself comforted. Having been comforted by God, he was able to bring comfort (cf. [2 Cor 1:3–4](#)) to “his wife Bathsheba” (v. [24](#)). In a consoling act of intimacy, “David went to her and lay with her.” Arms bereft of a child now embraced a king; and as a result Bathsheba “gave birth to a son.”

The royal parents named their child “Solomon” (*šēlōmō*, lit., “His [Yahweh’s] Restoration/Peace”). Following the agony of death, the Lord had given him peace. The contrasts between the first child of David and Bathsheba’s union and the second were sharp. Whereas the Lord fatally judged the first, “the LORD loved” the second. Though the first died before it was old enough to be given a covenant name, the second received a name from the God of the covenant: the Lord “sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah” (v. [25](#); lit., “Beloved of Yahweh”). The etymological commonality between David’s name and the name bestowed by God (both are based on the verb *dwd*) is a subtle hint to the reader that God had already set aside this child to be the next “David.” Later narratives prove the accuracy of this intimation.

(4) David Defeats and Subjects the Ammonites [12:26–31](#)

[12:26–28](#) Meanwhile, the siege of Rabbah continued. Though the chronological relationship between the narrative of [11:27–12:25](#) and the present verse is unclear, apparently the process of starving Rabbah into submission had taken at least nine months and perhaps two years. Nevertheless, Joab’s dogged persistence in the military undertaking paid off. At last he “captured the royal citadel” (v. [26](#); lit., “the city of the kingship”), apparently the heavily fortified subdivision of the city that contained the royal palace. In the process he also succeeded in capturing “its water supply” (v. [27](#); lit., “the city of the waters”)—perhaps a fortification guarding the city’s primary water supply—a feat virtually guaranteeing that the entire city would soon fall under Israelite control.

Now that the most difficult and dangerous portion of Rabbah's conquest had been accomplished, Joab "sent messengers to David" informing him of the key events and encouraging the king to "muster the rest of the people [NIV, "troops"] and besiege the city and capture it" (v. [28](#)). David probably had remained in Jerusalem out of consideration for his safety (cf. [21:17](#)) and also because of the need to attend to administrative and personal matters. As an additional incentive for the king to come, Joab indicated he would "take the city and it will be named after me" (cf. [5:9](#); [Num 32:42](#)) if David chose to remain in Jerusalem.

[12:29–31](#) Accordingly, "David mustered all the people [NIV, "the entire army"] and went to Rabbah" (v. [29](#)), a distance of more than forty miles, "and attacked and captured it." Having conquered the city, David received the possessions and privileges reserved for the king of the city. Among them was "the crown from the head of their king" (v. [30](#)). The weight of the jewel-studded crown—"a talent of gold," that is, about seventy-five pounds—as well as the witness of some traditions of the **LXX**, suggest that the crown was one normally set on a statue of either a former Ammonite king or their god Milcom (cf. [1 Kgs 11:5](#); [2 Kgs 23:13](#)). In addition to taking possession of the most ostentatious symbol of Ammonite kingship, David also "took a great quantity of plunder from the city," which he dedicated to the Lord for later use in constructing the Jerusalem temple (cf. [8:11–12](#); [1 Chr 29:2–5](#)).

After taking control of the most important and well-defended Ammonite city, David pressed the attack against "all the Ammonite towns" (v. [31](#)). In the process he took many prisoners of war, "consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes," as well as "brickmaking." These tasks are all related to the preparation of building materials and suggest that David was engaged in building or strengthening fortified structures throughout Israelite-held territory.