

2 Samuel 11:26–12:13aⁱⁱ

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; 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 had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within 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 very 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.”

ii About 2 Samuel 11:26–12:13a

Today’s reading comes from the conclusion of the story of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. Nathan’s parable illustrates the power of parables. To enter into the parable’s world is to risk self-revelation. When he hears the story, king David, as the guarantor of justice, reacts with outrage to the injustice recounted. Yet it is he himself, in the arrogance of his power, who has tried to put himself above the law. He has betrayed his anointing by God.

By the law of exact retribution David should die, but upon his acknowledgement of guilt the sentence upon him is annulled. Yet his sin has effects reaching beyond himself to his household, his realm, and his dynasty. These consequences will work themselves out in the death of the child and in the conflict among his sons. This episode reminds us that the working out of God’s purpose is not dependent upon perfect people, but upon God alone, despite the sinfulness of even God’s chosen servants.