An Old Testament KnoWhy[^1]
relating to the reading assignment for
Gospel Doctrine Lesson 24: “Create in Me a Clean Heart”
(2 Samuel 11-12; Psalm 51) (JBOTL24A)

![Image of David seeing Bathsheba](image)

Figure 1. James Tissot: David sees Bathsheba from his roof

**Question:** Why is the story of David and Bathsheba significant?

**Summary:** Chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Samuel are among the treasures of scripture. There are several reasons for their importance:

Historically, these chapters constitute the turning point that marks the end of the rise and the beginning of the fall of the house of David; Doctrinally, the setting provides a context for discussions of the consequences of adultery and murder, and of abuses stemming from David and Solomon’s often politically motivated taking of “many wives and concubines”; As a literary composition, we can experience and appreciate how an inspired and skilled author selectively presents details with incredible focus and economy of expression, thus revealing with exceptional clarity the central messages of the story; As a tragic personal account of the steps leading to temptation and damning sin, we can draw moral lessons that can fortify and protect us against similar mistakes.

Because of the incredible richness of this account, it is best discussed verse by verse. Before entering into detailed commentary, three questions relating to the story will be discussed as background.

**The Know**

We will begin by a discussion of these three questions:

- What is the attitude of scripture about David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the fact that both he and Solomon married “many wives and concubines”?
- Did David commit an unpardonable sin in the murder of Uriah?
- What is missing from the common interpretation of the parable the prophet Nathan related to David?

![Figure 2. James Tissot (1836-1902): The wives of David](https://i.imgur.com/3Q5Q5Q5.png)

**What is the attitude of scripture about David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and the fact that both he and Solomon married “many wives and concubines”?[2]**

In Jacob 3:24, we read: “David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was an abomination before me.” Some see these teachings of Jacob as a direct contradiction of D&C 132, the revelation concerning celestial and plural marriage.[3] However, the context of this verse, as well as subsequent revelation on the subject, makes it clear that scripture does not condemn the principle of plural marriage per se, but rather the fact
that David and Solomon made marriages that were not approved by the Lord.[4]

David also received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon and Moses my servants, as also many others of my servants, from the beginning of creation until this time; and in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not of me.

David’s first great sin was in coveting the wife of Uriah,[5] which led to adultery — an act strongly censured in scripture[6] and specifically characterized by President Spencer W. Kimball, then an apostle, as the “sin next to murder.”[7] Although David’s sin in this regard was confined to “the case of Uriah and his wife,”[8] Solomon made many marriages for personal and political reasons that were condemned by the Lord. The most serious consequences of these marriages was that Solomon’s seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines “turned away his heart”[9] from the Lord to other gods — for this reason God allowed the Kingdom of Israel to be divided after Solomon’s death.[10]

Jacob 3:30 makes it clear that plural marriage is an exception to the Lord’s more generally approved marriage practice. In other words, monogamy is the rule unless His people have been specifically commanded to the contrary: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.”[11]

Did David commit an unpardonable sin in the murder of Uriah?

David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba led to the even greater sin of his murder of her husband Uriah, followed by a host of personal tragedies from which he never fully recovered.[12] While sexual sins can be “forgiven to those who totally, consistently, and continuously repent in a genuine and comprehensive transformation of life,”[13] the sin of murder,[14] along with the sin against the Holy Ghost,[15] is an exception.

In D&C 42:18, we read: “He that kills shall not have forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come.”[16] President Kimball explained the meaning of this verse as being that “The murderer denies himself salvation in the celestial kingdom, and in this sense he cannot be forgiven for his crime.”[17]

Speaking of the consequences of David’s sin of murder, President Kimball wrote:

For his dreadful crime, all his life afterward he sought forgiveness. Some of the Psalms portray the anguish of his soul, yet David is still paying for his sin. He did not receive the resurrection at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter declared that his body was still in the tomb.[18] President Joseph F. Smith made this comment on David’s position:[19]

But even David, though guilty of adultery and murder of Uriah, obtained the promise that his soul should not be left in hell, which means, as I understand it, that even he shall escape the second [i.e., spiritual] death.

In other words, David’s resurrection will be to only a telestial glory.[20]

The Prophet Joseph Smith underlined the seriousness of the sin of murder for David as for all men, and the fact that there is no forgiveness for it:[21]

A murderer, for instance, one that sheds innocent blood, cannot have forgiveness. David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully with tears, for the murder of Uriah; but he could only get it
through hell,[22] he got a promise that his soul should not be left in hell. Although David was a king, he never did obtain the spirit and power of Elijah and the fullness of the Priesthood,[23] and the Priesthood that he received, and the throne and kingdom of David is to be taken from him and given to another by the name of David in the last days, raised up out of his lineage.

Brother Hoyt W. Brewster summarized David’s situation as follows:[24]

Though he prevailed over the mighty Goliath, clothed only in the armor of righteousness, he later lost the battle with Bathsheba for lack of such armament.[25] David’s is the tragic story of one whose faith brought him to great heights yet who sold his eternal soul through his sinful seduction of another man’s wife and the eventual murder of that faithful man.[26] His heinous deed was so great that “he lost everything.”[27] In spite of being eventually redeemed from hell, David has forever lost the crown of exaltation which he might have worn in the celestial kingdom, for “no murderer hath eternal life.”[28] “Even David must wait for those ‘times of refreshing,’[29] before he can come forth and his sins ‘be blotted out,’[30] … ‘many bodies of the Saints’[31] arose at Christ’s resurrection, … but it seems that David did not. Why? Because he had been a murderer.”[32]

See the Appendix below for an extensive discussion by Elder Bruce R. McConkie on David’s loss of blessings and on what are called in scripture the “sure mercies of David.”[33]

Why is missing from the common interpretation of the parable the prophet Nathan related to David?[34]

In a brilliant article, Hebrew Bible scholar Joshua A. Berman explains why the common interpretation of the prophet Nathan’s parable illustrating David’s sin is wanting.[35]

Like the parables of Jesus, the purpose of the story was both to reveal and to conceal. On the one hand, the story needed to conceal enough of the specifics of David’s situation that he did not recognize at first blush that he was the central figure of the story, thus provoking him by artifice to severely condemn the perpetrator of the crime. On the other hand, the story needed to sufficiently revealing that David would immediately recognize himself when Nathan declared “Thou art the man”[36] — and that later reflection on the story in the days that followed would further enrich his understanding.

The parable is told briefly, in four verses:[37]

And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.
### Figure 3. Three interpretations of Nathan’s parable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parable of the Rich Man’s Adultery</th>
<th>Parable of the Rich Man’s Murder — Bathsheba as Traveller</th>
<th>Parable of the Rich Man’s Murder — Child as Traveller</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rich Man</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Man</td>
<td>Uriah</td>
<td>Bathsheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Man’s Ewe</td>
<td>Bathsheba</td>
<td>Uriah, husband of Bathsheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Bathsheba seeking shelter from David</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>David’s unborn child</td>
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The table above summarizes the three interpretations of the parable discussed by Berman. The theme that runs through each of them is “royal abuse of power.” The Lord’s “special concern for the poor is a major theme of the Bible. And as his representative, the king and other judges were supposed to protect against abuse by the powerful.” Instead, the rich ruler took and slaughtered the poor man’s lamb.

The most common interpretation of the parable is shown in the leftmost column. This interpretation best fits David’s sin of adultery. His passions having been incited by his lustful regard, the rich and powerful David, already possessing “exceeding many flocks and herds,” took the “one precious lamb of the poor man (a lamb that was like a “daughter” to [Uriah]; Hebrew *bat* [“daughter”] is the first syllable of the name Bathsheba).”

Although on the surface these similarities to David’s situation seem compelling, scholars have long wondered about details of the parable that do not correspond to the story — in particular the event that motivated every subsequent happening in the story: the arrival of a traveler.

Most scholars attribute any divergences in the parable from the actual situation as trivial, no more than necessary obfuscations to ensure that David does not recognize himself in the parable until after he passes judgment on the perpetrator of the crime. However, Berman sees this approach as too facile.

He suggests the following alternate mapping of the parable, as shown in the middle column of the table above:

The wayfarer who appears at the rich man’s doorstep is Bathsheba seeking protection from David upon learning of her pregnancy. The rich man wishes to provide for his guest, even as David wishes to do the right thing and assume responsibility for Bathsheba’s welfare. The rich man could have taken from his own flock but instead performed the cruel deed of stealing his neighbor’s ewe and slaughtering it for the sake of the wayfarer. Similarly, David could have protected Bathsheba by...
paying a price himself and confessing his infractions. David, though, was unprepared to pay a price in his stature as king and instead does a dastardly deed in the service of a warped sense of responsibility to Bathsheba: he slaughters Uriah.

David … may have rationalized things [in thinking that he had no choice but to save the pregnant Bathsheba from the stigma of bearing an illegitimate child, and perhaps even from death on account of adultery]. Certainly, Israelites aware of the new marriage would have applauded the king’s move, a seeming act of grace toward the widow of a fallen war-hero. Yet, precisely because the marriage was technically lawful, and because from an ethical side there is merit to David’s sense of responsibility to provide for Bathsheba’s welfare, the prophet needs to rip the mask off of David’s actions and reveal the atrocity for what it is. When an innocent man is murdered, the heinous nature of the crime cancels out any residual good that may have come of it. The ends can never justify the means.

In arguing for an interpretation where Bathsheba plays both the role of the poor man and the traveler and Uriah is represented in the slaughtered ewe, Berman points out that the repeated Hebrew root for “came/come to him” in 2 Samuel 12:4 mirrors the report of when Bathsheba “came in unto [David]” in 2 Samuel 11:4. He further observes:

Although the ewe is feminine and Uriah a man, the text establishes an unmistakable lexical equivalence between them. Nathan claims that the ewe would “eat of his bread, drink of his cup and lay in his bosom.” These three actions of the ewe — eating, drinking, and laying intimately — are precisely those ascribed by the author to Uriah and his married life in chapter 11. Although Uriah presently refuses to visit his home, he describes what would normally go on at home in a language using these very same terms, as the formulation of verse 11 shows: “How can I go home and eat, and drink, and lay with my wife? This triad of terms appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, and suggests an intentional mapping between Uriah and the ewe.

According to Berman, the second interpretation does not invalidate the first one. Instead, the parable masterfully combines the Lord’s indictment of both of David’s grievous sins: adultery and murder. As further evidence for this, he notes a departure from prophetic convention when Nathan issues not one but two separate divine condemnations of David after he finishes the parable: one that highlights his crime of murder and the other that highlights his sin of adultery.

Going further, Berman asks us to consider the timing of Nathan’s confrontation with David. The Bible makes it clear that the Lord did not send Nathan until after the baby was born, seven or eight months after the king’s infractions. Why would the prophet tarry in his condemnation?

One could posit that the prophet wished to grant David a grace period in which to “come clean,” as it were. With no penitential overtures taken by the king, the prophet acts. Yet it can be no coincidence that the prophet times his censure to coincide with the arrival of the child. We may speculate that the child’s birth represented a moment of closure on the entire episode. … The arrival of a healthy child … would signal to David that indeed the Lord had granted him clemency and that the episode was behind him.

With this newfound appreciation of the timing of Nathan’s censure of David, we are ready to understand Berman’s formulation of a third interpretation of the parable, shown in the rightmost column of the table above:

Within these coordinates, each character in the parable is equivalent to a separate and distinct character in the surrounding narrative. Bathsheba here occupies the role of the poor man alone, while the attention now focuses upon the unborn child for whom David seeks to provide shelter, even as the
rich man in the parable strove to provide the wayfarer [KJV “traveller’”] seeking shelter. The image of a wayfarer is an apt one to portray the unborn child destined to perish soon after birth. A wayfarer, by definition, is one who arrives on the scene, but quickly departs. By depicting the newborn child to David as but a wayfarer, Nathan wished to suggest to David that the child would be but a temporary presence in his life. …

As he rises from mourning, David states, “I am going toward him, but he will not return to me.” … The language of “going” as a reference to moving from this world to the next in death and life, matches the use of the term … wayfarer … to describe the fetus, one who is as of yet unborn, but on his way to this life. …

As Nathan related the parable to the king, its connection to David’s misdeeds needed to remain opaque. Once Nathan reveals to David that he is the rich man, it becomes incumbent upon the king to probe its complexity and appreciate its multi-faceted comment on his behavior.

Commentary on 2 Samuel 11-12 (Part 1 of 2)

With the discussions above as background, we will now examine the rich lessons of chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Samuel in detail, verse-by-verse. This section will draw directly on masterful scholarly commentaries of others, especially those of Robert Alter, Everett Fox, and Dennis and Sandra Packard. The commentary on these chapters will continue in the next article in this series.

Chapter 11

1 ¶ AND it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth [to battle], that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

*after the year was expired.* “The most plausible meaning is the beginning of the spring, when the end of the heavy winter rains makes military action feasible.”

*David sent Joab.* “David, now a sedentary king removed from the field of action and endowed with a dangerous amount of leisure, is seen constantly operating through the agency of others, sending messengers within Jerusalem and out to Ammonite territory. Working through intermediaries, as the story will abundantly show, creates a whole new order of complications and unanticipated consequences.”

*But David tarried still at Jerusalem.* “[The ‘But’ signals a contrast:] Kings going forth to battle and King David staying home. … [The contrast] emphasizes David’s idleness, indicating that something was amiss with him from the very beginning of the story. In later chapters, we see David fighting in battle, ignoring his men’s pleas that he ‘go no more out with us to battle’ lest he be killed and ‘quench … the light of Israel.’ But in this chapter he tarries still at Jerusalem.”
2 And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman [was] very beautiful to look upon.

in an eventide. “A siesta on a hot spring day would begin not long after noon, so this recumbent king has been in bed an inordinately long time.”[61] “Although it may not have been uncommon at the palace to take an afternoon ‘siesta,’ it is certain that Joab and the army didn’t have the leisure for one.”[62]

from the roof he saw. “The palace is situated on a height, so David can look down on… Bathsheba bathing, presumably on her own rooftop. This situation of the palace also explains why David tells Uriah to ‘go down’ to his house. Later in the story, archers deal destruction from the heights of the city wall, the Hebrew using the same preposition, me’al, to convey the sense of ‘from above.’”[63]

3 And David sent and enquired after the woman. And [one] said, [Is] not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

[Is] not this Bathsheba. “[T]he one who was sent to inquire after the woman gives his report in the form of a question…. Why? This was the proper way to speak to the king. For the sake of appearances, a servant wouldn’t want to tell the king something the king didn’t already know — hence, he asks a question.”[64]

Uriah the Hittite. “A high-ranking officer in David’s army.”[65] His name, ironically, is a pious Israelite one, meaning ‘YHWH is my light.’”[66] “Because Uriah was a Hittite, a foreigner[or at the very least the descendant of a foreigner] dwelling among the Israelites, David should have been especially careful not to abuse or afflict him. The Lord’s commandment to Israel was, ‘Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt,’[67] and ‘The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.’[68] And Uriah was an especially deserving stranger. The way he shows reverence for ‘the ark’ in verse 11 and the fact that he was fighting in Israel’s army suggest that he was a convert to the Lord, and probably strong in the faith, as was the convert Ruth, the Moabitess.”[69]

4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was
purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

David sent... and took her and she came in unto him, and he lay with her. “It is not uncommon for biblical narrative to use a chain of verbs in this fashion to indicate rapid, single-minded action.”[70] The setting and situation described here of aristocracy coercing commoner invites an instructive comparison to the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife.[71] This account is told from the perspective of David’s prevailing assertiveness, whereas the Genesis account is told from the perspective of Joseph’s prevailing resistance.[72] “Though such affairs were tolerated in the non-Israelite nations, David’s situation is different: he has a knowledge of God’s law.”[73]

Joshua Berman concluded that Bathsheba was “an innocent victim. There is no overt censure of Bathsheba anywhere in the narrative. Moreover, she alone from among David’s wives emerges as the mother of the heir to the Davidic dynasty. It would be incongruous for the author to sternly censure David while so entirely exonerating his mistress for the very same adulterous act.”[74] The royal instructions of the mother of King Lemuel of Massa[75] in Proverbs poignantly recall her helpless situation.[76] “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of the destitute.”[77]

“In all of this, David’s sending messengers first to ask about Bathsheba and then to call her to his bed means that the adultery can scarcely be a secret within the court.”[78] “David seems to be taking no great pains to keep the affair a secret, so we might expect Joab and Uriah to have found out about it ‘through the grapevine,’ even before David sent for Uriah.”[79] There was, for one thing, open communication between the palace and the camp of Israel. There was also enough time, since it would have taken Bathsheba about two months to know she was pregnant. Then, too, when Bathsheba found out about her condition, she ‘sent and told David’—via a messenger, no doubt. Once again, word was likely to get around.”[80]

“for she was purified from her uncleanness. “The reference is to the ritually required bath after the end of menstruation. This explains Bathsheba’s bathing on the roof and also makes it clear that she could not be pregnant by her husband.”[81]
5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I [am] with child.

*I [am] with child.* “Astonishingly, these are the only words Bathsheba speaks in this story.”[^82] “Her message, short and to the point, seems a plea for help. With her husband away, she was liable by Jewish law to be stoned to death for adultery.”[^83]

6 ¶ And David sent to Joab, [saying], Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David.

*Send me Uriah the Hittite.* “If he didn’t already know, Joab must have wondered what business David had with Uriah, a subordinate. It would have been in keeping with Joab’s character … for him to have made secret inquiries to find out.”[^84]

7 And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded [of him] how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.

*David demanded [of him] how Joab did.* “Here it seems that David, needing a pretense for calling Uriah home from the battlefield, makes small talk, pretending to check up on Joab by getting Uriah’s report. … David’s speech seems perfunctory — he’s really not interested in Joab, the people (the army), or the war, and the short phrases with the repeated hows and dids help convey this. Notice we aren’t told Uriah’s answers. They don’t matter to David.”[^85]

8 And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king’s house, and there followed him a mess [of meat] from the king.

*Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet.* “David’s plan to cover his sin seems simple enough: get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba so the child will appear to be Uriah’s.”[^86]

9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house.

*But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house.* “Perhaps Uriah knows what’s going on and doesn’t want any part of it. Verses one through eight of this chapter begin with and; verse nine begins with but… [This] tells us that Uriah’s refusal to go home is significant: David’s plan has gone awry.”[^88] “It should be remembered… that soldiers in combat generally practiced sexual abstinence.”[^89]

10 And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from [thy] journey? why [then] didst thou not go down unto thine house?

*They … told David, saying, Uriah went not down.* “The servants must have known what David was up to. They probably enjoyed their role in the intrigue, implying, ‘What are you going to do now?’ when making their report to the king.”[^91]
David said unto Uriah, … Why … didst thou not go down. “[David’s question of Uriah makes] too much of the fact to maintain his innocent front. [This tells us that David’s state of mind] is getting more desperate. The pretense isn’t working. He probably suspects that Uriah knows, and asks the question to probe more deeply.”

11 And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? [as] thou livest, and [as] thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.

The ark, and Israel, and Judah … and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord. “[Uriah’s response implies that everything important is on the front.] Why does he make a point of this? David should be out there too, and this is what Uriah seems to be telling him. … [Uriah twice refers to Joab as his lord,] as if he’s saying his place is with Joab, not at the palace covering up for David.”

abide in tents… are encamped in the open fields. “[Uriah describes the resting places of the army, not their fighting.] Why? He seems to be drawing a contrast between where he has been sleeping and where David has been sleeping.”

shall I then go to mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? “Uriah now spells out all that David left unsaid when he urged him to go down to his house. The crucial detail of sleeping with Bathsheba comes at the very end. … If Uriah does not know that David has cuckolded him, he is the instrument of dramatic irony — the perfect soldier vis-à-vis the treacherous king who is desperately trying to manipulate him so that the husband will unwittingly cover the traces of [David’s sin]. If Uriah does know of the adultery, he is a rather different character — not naïve but shrewdly aware, playing a dangerous game of hints in which he deliberately pricks the conscience of the king, cognizant, and perhaps not caring, that his own life may soon be forfeit.”

“Interesting variations on the triad, ‘to eat, and to drink, and to lie with my wife,’ recur throughout this story. In verse 13, Uriah eats and drinks before David, but lies on his bed with the servants. In 12:3, the lamb in Nathan’s parable eats of the poor man’s own food, drinks of his own cup, and lies in his bosom. In 12:16, David abstains from eating and drinking and lies on the earth. Then, in 12:20, David first eats (the drinking is implied) and then lies with Bathsheba. What does the repetition emphasize? It emphasizes David’s indulgence and, by contrast, Uriah’s sacrifice. While Uriah is on the battlefront serving his king, David is home, not only eating, drinking and lying with his wives (presumably), but also with Uriah’s wife. The sin is all the worse because it has been by the joint occurrence of Uriah’s allegiance to David and David’s neglect of duty that the adultery has so easily taken place. If Uriah had been less dutiful, he could have been home watching out for his wife.”

[as] thou livest, and [as] thy soul liveth. “The normal way to swear the oath seems to have been ‘as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth.’ Is the variant we see here deliberate or a corruption of the text? “Garsiel observes that when Uriah swears emphatically by David’s life…, he does not add the deferential ‘my lord the king.'”

12 And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow.

Tarry here. David “apparently wants more time to make his plan work and so tells Uriah to ‘tarry’ as he himself has been tarrying.”

13 And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

David called him. “The verb here has the idiomatic sense of ‘invite.'”

he did eat and drink before him. “The preposition [before] is an indication of hierarchical distance between subject and king.” “[A]t that time, if you had eaten with someone, you were especially obliged to treat him as a friend. The implication of Christ’s statement, ‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me,’ seems to be that Judas’s betrayal was worse because he had eaten with Christ.”
he made him drunk. “Plying Uriah with wine is a last desperate attempt, and a rather crude one, to get him to [lie] with his wife.”

he went to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord. “It’s funny that Uriah’s bed with the servants should be called his bed. It’s the historian’s way of saying David’s ploys are getting a bit old in the face of Uriah’s steadfastness. Uriah’s insistence on sleeping with the servants must have shown David that it wasn’t for a whim or for an over-zealous loyalty that he wasn’t going down to his house.”

To be continued in the next article in this series —
JBOTL26B: David and Bathsheba, Part 2 of 2)

My gratitude for the love, support, and advice of Kathleen M. Bradshaw on this article. Thanks also to Stephen T. Whitlock for valuable comments and suggestions.

Further Study

For Gospel Topics Essays on the Church website concerning “Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” see

For additional in-depth perspectives on this topic from a reliable source, see “Joseph Smith’s Polygamy” (http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/).


Appendix: Elder Bruce R. McConkie on David’s Loss of Blessings and the “Sure Mercies of David”

David knew he had forfeited his claim to eternal life and the continuation of the family unit in the realms ahead. Yet he importuned the Lord for such blessings as he still might receive. And though a just God could no longer confer upon his erring servant the fulness of that reward which might have been his, yet according to the great plan of mercy, which causes the resurrection to pass upon all men, he could bring him up eventually to a lesser inheritance. His soul need not be cast off eternally to dwell with Lucifer and those who are in open and continuing rebellion against righteousness.

True, because of his sins, he had cast his lot with the wicked “who suffer the vengeance of eternal fire,” and “who are cast down to hell and suffer the wrath of Almighty God, until the fulness of times, when Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet, and shall have perfected his work.” But in that day when death and hell deliver up the dead which are in them, David and his fellow sufferers shall come forth from the grave. Because he was a member of the Church and had entered into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and then had fallen into sin, the revelation says of him: “He hath fallen from his exaltation, and received his portion.”

Implicit in this historical recitation of what David did to lose his salvation, and in the doctrinal laws which nonetheless guaranteed him a resurrection and a lesser degree of eternal reward, are two great truths: (1) That the Holy One of Israel, the Holy One of God, the Son of David, would die and then be resurrected; and (2) that because he burst the bands of death and became the first-fruits of them that slept, all men also would be resurrected, both the righteous and the wicked, including saints who became sinners, as was the case with David their king.
These two truths became known as and were called “the sure mercies of David,”[110] meaning that David in his life and death and resurrection was singled out as the symbol to dramatize before the people that their Holy One would be resurrected and that all men would also come forth from the grave. David knew and understood this and wrote about it. So also did Isaiah, which means the principle was known and taught in ancient Israel; and both Peter and Paul made it the basis of persuasive New Testament sermons, in which they identified the Holy One of Israel as that Jesus whom they preached.

Speaking of his own resurrection and that of his Lord, David wrote: “My flesh also shall rest in hope,”[111] meaning, ‘My body shall come forth from the grave,’ ‘For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,’[112] meaning, ‘My spirit shall not remain in hell forever, but shall be joined with my body when I am resurrected.’ Death and hell shall thus deliver up dead David who is in them. Then David came forth with the great Messianic pronouncement, “Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”[113] That is, ‘The Holy One of Israel shall come forth in his resurrection before his dead body is permitted to decay and become dust.’

With accusing words, Peter charged his fellow Jews with taking “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs,”[114] and causing him to be “crucified and slain”[115] by wicked hands. But God hath raised him up, Peter testified, “having loosed the pains of death.”[116] Then Peter quotes the whole of that Messianic message with which we are now dealing, doing so with some improvement over the way it is recorded in the Old Testament. Peter says: “For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”[117]

This prophecy means, Peter says, that David “spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption.”[118] Then the Chief Apostle bears testimony of the fulfillment of the prophecy. “This Jesus hath God raised up,” he says, “whereof we all are witnesses. … Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ.”[119] He is the Lord who was ever before David’s face. He is the Holy One who should come forth from the grave. Thus Peter has used David’s words to prove the Holy One would be resurrected, and he has used his own testimony and that of his fellow apostles to prove that he was resurrected.

Lest his hearers be left in doubt, however, as to David’s personal state, the Chief Apostle says, “Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. … For David is not ascended into the heaven.”[120] Further, David has not yet been resurrected, for he is numbered with “the spirits of men who are to be judged, and are found under condemnation; And these are the rest of the dead; and they live not again until the thousand years are ended, neither again, until the end of the earth.”[121]

Isaiah recorded the Lord’s invitation that men should come unto him, believe his word, live his law, and be saved. Part of the invitation was couched in these words of Deity: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people.”[122] That is to say: To all who will believe in him, the Lord of heaven will make the same covenant that he made with David, in that they too will know of their Messiah’s resurrection, and that the souls of all men are thereby raised from the grave. David had the promise that he would be saved from death and hell, through Christ, and all the faithful could have that same assurance, though, as here expressed, David is made the illustration, the “witness,” the symbol of these great truths.

Paul preached that of David’s seed “hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.”[123] He said that those at Jerusalem, “and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets,”[124] who had prophesied of him, caused that he be put to death. After he was slain, Paul says, “they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.”[125]
Having so taught and testified, Paul followed the same course we have seen Peter pursue; he turned to David and his great Messianic utterance about the resurrection, but he wove in also Isaiah’s Statement about the sure mercies of David. “As concerning that he raised him up from the dead,” Paul said, “now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he said also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”

References


Hales, Brian C. "Encouraging Joseph Smith to practice plural marriage: The accounts of the angel with a drawn


**Endnotes**


[3] For example, Mark Twain once quoted Jacob 2:23-26 and sardonically concluded: “Polygamy is a recent feature in the Mormon religion, and was added by Brigham Young after Joseph Smith’s death. Before that, it was regarded as an abomination” (M. Twain, Roughing, pp. 72-73).


[11] Brian J. Baird has argued that this verse should be interpreted specifically in terms of levirate marriage “by which a man was responsible for marrying his dead brother’s wife if that brother died before having an heir” (B. J. Baird, Understanding Jacob’s Teachings, p. 227). While Baird’s conclusion seems a plausible conjecture about how Jacob’s teachings might have been interpreted by his contemporary hearers, two secondhand reports of the words of an angel commanding the Prophet to commence the practice provide evidence for a more general application of this verse in Joseph Smith’s time:

The Lord … sent an holy angel with a drawn sword unto [Joseph Smith], saying unto him … that the time has now come that I will raise up seed unto me as I spoke by my servant Jacob as is recorded in the Book of Mormon, therefore, I command my people. (Oliver Preston Robinson ed., *History of Joseph Lee Robinson* (n. p.: History Comes Home, 2007), 27, as cited in B. C. Hales, Encouraging Joseph Smith, p. 65).

An angel came to [Joseph Smith] … Joseph said he talked to him soberly about it, and told him it was an abomination and quoted scripture to him. He said in the Book of Mormon it was an abomination in the eyes of the Lord, and they were to adhere to these things except the Lord speak. (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Remarks, April, 14, 1905, Brigham Young University, vault MSS 363, fd. 6, 2–3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, as cited in ibid., p. 70).

Also attesting a more general application of this phrase are the words of Lehi to his sons when he instructed them to take wives of Ishmael’s family so that they might “raise up seed to the Lord” (1 Nephi 7:1).
Elder Orson Pratt, in commenting on this verse, interpreted similarly (O. Pratt, The Seer, 1, February 1853, pp. 30-31):

Thus we see, that a man among the Nephites, by the law of God, had no right to take more than one wife, unless the Lord should command for the purpose of raising up seed unto Himself. … [Without] such a command, they were strictly limited to the one wife doctrine: “otherwise” says the Lord, “they shall hearken unto these things”; that is, without an express command, they should hearken to the original law limiting them to one wife.

With specific respect to Jacob’s words “concubines [ye] shall have none” (Jacob 2:27), Hugh W. Nibley concluded that the Lord “doesn’t like the concubine system at all” (H. W. Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, 23). Rodney J. Turner gave a similar opinion (Morality and marriage in the Book of Mormon, in M. S. Nyman et al., Jacob, p. 289):

I [do not] believe [that] there [will] ever be concubinage again. Those lesser times with their lesser laws are gone forever. Every sealed woman is a full wife with access to every right and blessing enjoyed by her sisters. For the Lord has revealed that the purpose of plural marriage is not to gratify the lusts or ambitions of men, but to magnify celestial women. It is to recognize their divine right to self-fulfillment, worthy husbands, and honorable motherhood; and to thereby raise up a holy posterity to themselves and to their God. Eternal marriage (whichever form) is the only way the immortality and eternal life of man and woman-the endless work of God-can continue (see D&C 132:63; Moses 1:38-39)”

[14] President Kimball acknowledges that “even among wilful murderers there are grades and categories” and “they certainly will suffer different degrees of punishment hereafter” (ibid., pp. 129-130). And “of course, the laws both of the land and of God recognize a great difference between murder or wilful slaughter and manslaughter which was not premeditated. Likewise men unfortunately must take others’ lives in war. … There are mitigating circumstances but certainly the blame and responsibility rest heavily upon the heads of those who brought about the war [cf. Message of the First Presidency, 6 April 1942, Message of the First Presidency, 6 April 1942, 159-161; W. Shakespeare, Henry V, 1:2:9-32; 4:1:130-146], making necessary the taking of life. It is conceivable that even in war there may be many times when there is a legitimate choice and enemy combatants could be taken prisoner rather than be killed” (S. W. Kimball, Miracle, p. 129).

With respect to Church members, excommunication of those who have committed murder is required in most circumstances (ibid., p. 131). With respect to non-members who have murdered, President Kimball states that “missionaries do not knowingly baptize such people. Rather than assuming this great responsibility, they refer the problem to their mission presidents who in turn will wish to refer the matter to the First Presidency of the Church” (ibid., p. 130). In support of this position, President Kimball cited the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 10 March 1844, p. 339; see also p. 188):

Peter referred to the same subject on the day of Pentecost, but the multitude did not get the endowment that Peter had; but several days after the people asked, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter says, “I would ye had done it ignorantly” (Acts 3:17), speaking of crucifying the Lord, etc. He did not say to them, “Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins”; but he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).
This is the case with murderers. They could not be baptized for the remission of sins, for they had shed innocent blood.

[15] See JST Matthew 12:31-32. President Kimball also writes: “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin. Comparatively few Church members will commit murder wherein they shed innocent blood, and we hope only a few will deny the Holy Ghost” (S. W. Kimball, Miracle, p. 123).

For a discussion of the kind of knowledge required for one to become a “son of perdition,” see J. M. Bradshaw, Faith, Hope, and Charity, pp. 100-102; J. M. Bradshaw, Temple Themes in the Oath, pp. 63-64.

[22] Elsewhere Joseph Smith taught that “such characters cannot be forgiven, until they have paid the last farthing” (ibid., p. 188).
[23] The implication is that had David received these blessings — i.e., the fulness of the priesthood (having been ordained a priest and king unto the most high God) and having received the fulness of the sealing blessings — he could not have been resurrected to a kingdom of glory. See also D&C 132:19, 26, 27.
[28] 1 John 3:15. Cf. J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, p. 188.
[32] J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, p. 188.
[34] 2 Samuel 12:1-23.
[40] 2 Samuel 12:2.
[43] Ibid., pp. 8-9, 13.
[44] 2 Samuel 11:5.

Note that it is not obvious, (as per Polzin, David and the Deuteronomist, p. 123) that the rich man’s “abundant flocks and herds” (12:1) refer to David’s numerous wives. Rather, from Nathan’s explanation of the parable in 12:7-8, it would appear that the rich man’s (i.e., David’s) riches are the totality of his kingdom: “That man (i.e., the rich man) is you! Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: It was I who anointed you king over Israel and it was I who rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave
you your master’s house and possession of your master’s wives, and I gave you the House of Israel and Judah, and if that were not enough, I would give you twice as much more” (my translation here follows NJPS).

[46] In his full article, Berman justifies the idea that “Bathsheba can inhabit two roles in the parable because the ordeal she suffers transports her through multiple identities across the story. … At the outset of the narrative, Bathsheba inhabits but a single role: she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite (11:3). Yet in the continuation of the story her primary interaction is with David, to whom she urgently turns, seeking protection” (ibid., p. 10).

[47] 2 Samuel 12:3.
[52] Ibid., pp. 15-16.
[53] 2 Samuel 12:23.
[55] E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David.
[56] D. Packard et al., Feasting. The Packards’ commentary follows the interpretive approach advocated by the late BYU professor and eminent Shakespeare scholar Arthur Henry King (A. H. King, Afterword; see also A. H. King, Class Notes; A. H. King, Arm; A. J. Birch, King; J. M. Bradshaw, Moses Temple Themes (2014), pp. 5-6).
[58] Ibid., pp. 249-250.
[59] 2 Samuel 21:16-22. Cf. 1 Samuel 18:16 where his willingness to personally lead troops into the fray endears him to the people.
[65] Cf. 2 Samuel 23:39 where Uriah’s name is ironically displayed in the prominent last position of the list of David’s valiant soldiers.
[66] E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David, p. 199.
[68] Leviticus 19:34.
[71] See Genesis 39.
[75] Modern translations generally take the word “prophecy” in Proverbs 31:1 as a mistranslation of “Massa,” a nation in north Arabia. “Most suppose that [King Lemuel] was not an Israelite (which is consistent with the fact that the words for ‘son’ in 31:2 and ‘kings’ in v. 3b have Aramaic spellings, and with the absence of the special name Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, from any of the sayings)” (L. T. Dennis et al., ESV, 31:1-9).
[76] Indeed, “Jewish legend identifies him as Solomon, making this advice from his mother Bathsheba; but there is no evidence for that” (NET Bible, NET Bible, Proverbs 31:1).
[82] Ibid., p. 251.
[84] Ibid., p. 112.
[85] Ibid., p. 112.
[86] Ibid., p. 112.
[87] Ibid., p. 113.
[88] Ibid., p. 113.
[91] Ibid., p. 114.
[92] Ibid., p. 114.
[93] Ibid., p. 115.
[94] Ibid., p. 115.
[97] Ibid., p. 115. See 1 Samuel 20:3; 1 Samuel 25:26; 2 Kings 2:2; 2 Kings 4:30.
[99] D. Packard et al., Feasting, p. 115.
[101] Ibid., p. 253.