

DAVID AND NATHAN THE PROPHET

II Samuel 12:1-25

Introduce the lesson by reminding the classes that Saul's disobedience in the case of the Amalekites led to Samuel's saying that the kingdom "was departed" from him. The immediate anointing of David resulted. Then review David's life while Saul continued on the throne, and finally speak of the difference between the two men and of David's achievements as king, before taking up the incident of our lesson.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord permits sorrow to come to us only for our good.

The written Word of God is all parable.

Truth is given us in order that we may judge our own states rather than those of others.

We never become so good that we are no longer in danger of falling into evil.

Notes for Parents

The second king of Israel was David. Immediately after the first disobedience of Saul (I Samuel 13), the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David. At that time David was only a boy keeping his father's sheep, and it was a long time before he became king in the sight of the people. We all know many stories of his early years.

After Saul's death only the people of the southern part of the Holy Land at first accepted David as king. He reigned seven years in Hebron before he was recognized by all the people. Then he captured Jerusalem, made it his capital, and brought the ark there. From that center he carried on a completely successful campaign against all the enemies of Israel and extended its borders farther than they had ever been extended before.

David is sometimes held up to children as a great hero—one to be imitated. The Israelites so considered him. But we should never take this attitude toward the men and women in the Bible story. There is only one example which we ought to place before our children, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our story for today shows us that David, in spite of all the fine things that he accomplished, was only an imperfect man and liable, as we all are, to yield to temptation. He broke both the commandment against adultery and that against murder, feeling that his high office would save him from punishment. Samuel was now dead, and the Lord spoke to David through another prophet, Nathan. We remember that the Lord speaks to us through the Word. The Word is our prophet. And our chapter shows us just how the Lord through the Word comes to us when we have sinned. Nathan told David a simple parable, and when David—not thinking that what Nathan was telling him had anything to do with what he himself had done—condemned the man in the parable, Nathan said, “Thou art the man.” As we read the Word, we can see clearly the faults and the sins of the men and women whose lives are portrayed there. Then, if we have sinned in the same way, there comes to us suddenly the conviction: “Thou art the man.”

If we acknowledge our sin and repent, as David did, we can learn by the experience and still produce good, but we do not escape the consequences of our sin. David’s first son by Bathsheba died. Evil cannot produce good. We cannot break any one of the commandments without suffering for it. They are just as binding today as when they were given by the Lord from Sinai.

Primary

These children should remember David’s birthplace and the story of David and Goliath. They are old enough to understand why Nathan approached David with a parable. Tell them what David’s punishment was, and that it teaches us that good never can come from evil.

The second king of the Israelites was David.
His home was in Bethlehem.

What do we think of when Bethlehem is mentioned?

David was only a young boy when he was anointed, and Saul continued to be king in the eyes of the people.

But the spirit of the Lord was with David now instead of with Saul.

But finally Saul was killed in battle, and later David was crowned king. Like Saul, David was a great warrior, but David did not trust in himself as Saul had done. He obeyed the Lord, and so the Lord could be with him and give him victory over all the enemies of Israel. One of the cities he took was Jerusalem. He made it his capital and brought the ark there and had a new tabernacle made for it.

But later in life he committed a great sin.

He had Uriah the Hittite killed so that he could marry Uriah's wife, Bathsheba.

Whom did the Lord send to rebuke him?

What story did Nathan tell David?

How did David judge the man in the story?

Then what did Nathan tell him?

How did David receive this statement?

Why do you think Nathan told him the story first?

What was David's punishment?



Junior

The Juniors should have a more detailed account of David's life and accomplishment. Draw as much as possible of this from their own memories. When the story for today is reached, the teacher will find in the Junior notes several lessons within the grasp of this age group which may be brought out.

The story of David's early life is one we have all read. Let us see how much you remember of it.

Where was David born?

What was he doing when he was anointed?

What talent did he have which brought him to Saul's attention?

What enemy did he overcome single-handed?

What weapon did he use?

Who was his special friend in Saul's court?

Why did he finally have to flee from Saul?

David's first capital was Hebron, where he reigned for seven

years over the people of the southern part of the land. Hebron had been Abraham's home and at the time of the division of the land it was given to Caleb. After Ishbosheth's death, the people of the northern part of the land came under David's rule also. He conquered Jerusalem—which the Jews had never before been able to take from the Jebusites who possessed it—and made it his capital. You remember how he brought the ark there and put it in a new tabernacle because the Lord had told him that he was not the one who should build the temple. Because David obeyed the Lord, the Lord could give him victory over all the enemies of Israel, and he extended the borders of the land farther than they had ever extended before.

People sometimes think that the men in the Bible story whom God prospered must have been altogether good. They think of them as heroes to be imitated. Those who think this have a hard time explaining our story for today, for David had done a very wrong thing. He had seen a beautiful woman named Bathsheba and wanted to marry her, and when he found she was already married, he had her husband placed in the front line of a battle so that he would be killed. Then he married Bathsheba. He knew he was a great king and perhaps he really imagined he could do no wrong. But no one ever reaches that point.

Nathan the prophet was sent to David by the Lord. Nathan did not immediately charge David with his sin. When someone finds fault with us, our first impulse and effort is to defend ourselves, isn't it? Instead Nathan told David a simple little story apparently about other people. David could see clearly the wrong which the rich man in Nathan's story had done, and he judged him very severely. Then Nathan said, "Thou art the man." And David could see that he really had done the very same thing, and he could not help acknowledging his sin.

What was David's punishment?

How did David take the sickness of his child?

How did he surprise his household when the child died?

What reason did he give?

Who was the second son of David and Bathsheba?

There are many lessons in this story. One important one is that we should look at our own conduct squarely and be willing to judge it honestly. We must be willing to let the Lord through his Word say to us, “Thou art the man.” Another lesson is that there is no escaping the consequences of wrongdoing. We may think we have “got away with it,” but every wrong we do actually destroys something good in us which might have grown up, like David’s child, to give us greater happiness. The Lord has to permit such losses, or we should never try to improve.

And there is another lesson. What is done cannot be undone, but if we acknowledge our sin, as David did, and accept the justice of the consequences, we can use the experience to help us to become stronger and more useful. This is why David and Bathsheba were allowed to become the parents of Solomon, the greatest of the three kings.

The people in the Bible story were men and women just like us, with many faults as well as virtues. The Lord wants us to learn from them both what to do and what not to do. The whole of the Word is a parable which the Lord has told us through His prophets, just as surely as he sent Nathan with his parable to David. We are meant to read the Word and think about it and judge ourselves by it, so that we can see and acknowledge our faults and try to do better from day to day.

Intermediate

The lesson of the story for today is an important one, and as it can be drawn directly from the letter, we have done nothing this time with particular correspondences except for the general difference between Saul and David.

David was humble and obedient and trusted the Lord. He pictures the rule of divine truth as it is understood from a spiritual perception instead of in a natural way. We have had the stories of David’s playing his harp or lyre to sooth Saul, of his early fight with Goliath, and of his friendship with Saul’s son Jonathan, who

saved him from his father's jealous rage and helped him to escape. For Saul continued to be king as long as he lived. As soon as David was anointed, however, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." This was why David, even in exile, increased in favor with the people. When Saul and Jonathan were finally killed in a defeat at the hands of the Philistines, another son of Saul, Ishbosheth, was crowned king by Abner, the captain of Saul's army, but David was made king in Hebron by all the people of the southern part of the land. This is the first time the division of the land into north and south appears in the Bible story. David reigned seven years in Hebron and then Ishbosheth was assassinated by two of his own captains, and the northern part of the country also accepted David as king.

David, like Saul, was a fighting king, and because he obeyed the Lord he was not defeated as Saul had been. He extended the boundaries of the land, subdued all its enemies, and took Jerusalem, which was one of the cities that had stood out against the Israelites up to that time. David made Jerusalem his capital and brought the ark there, putting up a new tabernacle for it, because the Lord told him that he was not to be the one to build the temple.

David always obeyed the commands of the Lord when they came to him personally through a prophet. But as time went on and successes continued to come to him, he forgot that the fundamental laws of God are the ten commandments. The background of our story for today is found in chapter 11. David saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba and wanted her for his wife, although he already had several wives. With the Israelites of that day it was not considered unlawful for a man to have more than one wife. But Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David first broke the commandment against adultery and then attempted to conceal his sin by having Uriah sent into the front line of the battle, where he was killed.

The story of David's sin and its punishment should show us plainly that the persons in the Bible story are not meant to be examples to us in the sense that their conduct is always to be

copied. They were weak and often evil men, and the Lord uses their lives to show us what not to do as well as what to do. When the Word describes David as a man after the Lord's own heart, it is not the man that is meant but the faculty which he represents in the spiritual sense; and this faculty—even after it has gained dominion in our lives—must constantly be kept subject to the judgment of the commandments or it will go astray, as David did when he considered himself great enough to be above the commandments.

If Nathan had gone to David and charged him directly with his sin, David's first thought would have been to defend and excuse his conduct. We know that this is always our natural reaction to a direct rebuke. But when the case was presented to him as a story about other people, his mind was free to pronounce righteous judgment.

This is just the way in which the Lord calls our attention to our sins—through his prophets in parable. We read the stories and teachings of the Word first in an impersonal way. We form our judgments of them unhampered by thoughts of self. Then, when our judgment is formed, the Lord says to us through our conscience, "Thou art the man." The deep lessons of the Word lie concealed in the simple and seemingly commonplace stories of the letter. These stories lie in our minds until the moment comes when we need the lesson. Then they are suddenly quickened to life and present application.

David had become so great that he thought himself above the commandments. We are all subject to this same weakness. Most of us lead outwardly correct lives, gain the respect of our neighbors, and come to consider ourselves established as good Christians. Then some strong desire of ours meets an obstacle. In order to satisfy it we must do something which is technically forbidden by the commandments. Unconsciously we argue, "I am a good person. I would not have a desire which was really wrong. This thing I want would further the good work which I can do in the world. Therefore it cannot be wrong for me to remove the obstacle. The end justifies the means."

But Nathan's simple parable brought David down to the valley of humiliation. Read the fifty-first Psalm as an expression of this state. The heading of the Psalm reads, "To the chief musician, a Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." It is a Psalm which we all need to repeat frequently as a reminder of our weakness and need of direction.

Basic Correspondences

David = the rule of divine truth as seen by
our spiritual reason

Senior

Several lessons should be drawn from this chapter for the Seniors: the nature of the Word and why it is written in parable form, the necessity of obedience to the commandments however sure we may feel of ourselves, the general meaning of marriage and of its perversions, the fact that sin always brings punishment, and the good use we may make of such experiences, provided we repent. It is the repentance which brings the good.

We are all well acquainted with the general story of David, the second great king of Israel. He represents a deeper and more spiritual understanding of divine truth than Saul. Such an understanding does not develop overnight. David was anointed by Samuel immediately after Saul's act of disobedience, and at that time the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and was with David instead. But Saul continued to be king in the eyes of the people, and after Saul's death his son Ishbosheth was crowned and ruled for seven years over the people of the northern part of the land. David had also been crowned and was ruling in Hebron. This pictures a time in our lives when we have realized that our first natural understanding of the Lord's Word and what it requires of us is not adequate—that we need to look into divine truth more deeply and in a humbler spirit; but still our immediate impulse is to judge by appearances. We get rid of any habit only gradually.

When David finally came into full control, he subdued all the enemies of Israel, captured Jerusalem and brought the ark there,

and extended the borders of Israel farther than they had ever been extended before. The spiritual understanding of divine truth, once firmly established in our minds, removes many temptations which have formerly troubled us and gives us a firmness of purpose and a breadth of view of which we have not dreamed before.

Then comes our story of David's sin. We are tempted to forget that even our established character is not a guarantee of salvation, that the commandments can never be broken with impunity no matter how important we are or how far our regeneration has progressed. David saw and desired Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and not only committed adultery with her but afterward tried to conceal his sin by using his royal power to send Uriah to a battle station where he would certainly be killed.

It would be hard to find a story in the Word which illustrates the general principles of the New Church doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures more clearly than this of David's sin and its results. David here is obviously a sinner; yet he is the Lord's anointed, to whom it was promised that his line should never fail. We see then that it is not the man that is laudable but the thing he is chosen to represent. We see that men, just as they were, could be chosen by the Lord as his instruments in the giving of the Word. And in Nathan's parable and its effect we have a clear example in the letter of the manner in which the Word speaks to us and the reason why it is given in parables.

David, as we have seen, represents in our individual lives the rule of the principle of divine truth; but our understanding of this truth, even when it has risen above mere appearances and become spiritual, is still imperfect, just as David was, and prone to be obscured by our own selfishness and prejudices. It is easily led astray by a desire for anything which appears beautiful but is not rightfully yours, and we all tend to justify ourselves in taking the means necessary to get what we feel we should have. The marriage relation represents inmosty the union of divine love and divine wisdom in the Lord, and all perversions of this relation represent attempts to join evil to truth, or good to falsity. When we try to justify

ourselves in doing wrong to satisfy some selfish desire, we commit spiritual adultery.

The Word, pictured by Nathan the prophet, by presenting our problems to us in an objective form, clears our vision and enables us to distinguish impartially between right and wrong. It is easy to judge the conduct of the people in the Bible story, and then all we need is to turn the same judgment upon ourselves—to hear the voice of Nathan saying, “Thou art the man.”

David repented and was forgiven, but he did not escape the consequences of his sin. The death of Bathsheba’s first son pictures the fact that nothing spiritually living can be produced as a direct result of wrongdoing. But her second son, Solomon, conceived after David’s repentance, became the greatest of Israel’s kings. This pictures the fact that genuine repentance and humility may lead to greatness.

This is a distinction we need to keep constantly in mind. We often hear it argued that good comes out of evil, that certain necessary virtues are developed by war, that a young man is better for having “sowed his wild oats.” This is not true. Evil always results in a loss, no matter what course may be followed afterward. But our freedom provides that after this loss, if we choose to accept it as a lesson, repent, and change our ways, we may still go on to great things. We cannot go back and undo the wrongs we have committed—although we can sometimes reduce their consequences to others—but we can start afresh with the bitter experience as a warning. We cannot be what we might have been, but we can be something else which is good.

Adult

Again and again, as in this story of Nathan’s parable, the lesson is brought home to us that as long as we are in this world we are liable to temptation and liable to yield to it. There are plenty of discussion topics here, but try to make this general lesson the outstanding one. It may be pointed up by reading to the class Ezekiel 18:20-24.

David, the second king of Israel, represents the rule of divine truth spiritually understood. This understanding of the truth is first recognized by us as a result of our realization of the inadequacy of our natural understanding of it—represented by Saul—but it is a long time before it comes into full control in our life. We all know the stories of David's early life—his being called from tending his father's sheep at Bethlehem to be anointed by Samuel, his being called to Saul's court because of his skill in playing the lyre, his victory over Goliath, and his friendship with Saul's son Jonathan, who helped him to escape when Saul's jealousy would have killed him. We can see these incidents as picturing the first relations between the spiritual and the natural understanding of divine truth in our minds. We have a similar picture in the story of the relations of Joseph with Potiphar and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39), and the period when David was in exile may be compared with the time when Joseph was in prison, the David stories of course representing the cycle at a later period in our life than the Joseph stories.

Even after Saul's death, David did not immediately come to the throne, for Abner, the captain of Saul's host, crowned Saul's son Ishbosheth. David was at the same time crowned in Hebron by the people of the southern part of the land, and reigned there for seven years. At the end of this time Ishbosheth was assassinated by two of his own captains and the northern tribes also accepted David. This temporary division of the land foreshadowed the final division which took place after Solomon's death. The southern part of the land represents the heart or will and the northern part the mind or understanding. Hebron had been Abraham's home. David's ruling there first pictures the fact that the heart—and especially the innocent states stored up in us as remains from our earliest infancy—accepts the rule of spiritual truth before the mind fully yields to its control. It was not until David had been anointed king by the northern tribes that he captured Jerusalem, which up to that time had been firmly held by the Jebusites. He made it his capital and brought the ark there, and from that center went on to full conquest of the enemies of Israel, extending the borders of the

Holy Land farther than they had ever extended before.

As we read the long story of David, we cannot help being struck by the sudden change which takes place in his fortunes beginning with II Samuel 11, when he first sees Bathsheba, covets and takes her, and arranges to have her husband Uriah killed in battle. From that time on, although David continues as king and actually retains all the territory he has conquered, he is plagued by internal troubles, beginning with the conspiracy of his son Absalom and ending with that of his son Adonijah. In our chapter for today, Nathan the prophet foretells this: “Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house.”

The turning point in David’s life and career came at the moment when he, too, at last became confident in his own might and careless of the commandments. David knew the commandments and knew that his rise to power had been won for him by the Lord and not by his own strength or wisdom. Yet when he wanted Bathsheba, he did not hesitate to break the commandments to get her and even used his authority as king to establish his possession. The crimes of adultery and murder are in themselves deadly to spiritual life. Pure marriage love is the love from which all heavenly loves flow, and its opposite closes heaven; and we have seen in an earlier lesson that innocence is essential to heavenly states. Adultery and murder are characteristic of the hells (Matthew 5:21-28). David’s yielding to the temptation to commit these two crimes shows us how even the spiritual understanding of the Lord’s truth may be misused and led to justify our evil desires, if we allow ourselves to think that we have reached a state in which the commandments may be transgressed with impunity. It is possible for us at any time, no matter how far we have progressed in regeneration, to fall into hell if we cease to test our lives by the commandments. Indeed, the further we have progressed the deeper the hell into which we may fall, if we use the Lord’s gifts for selfish purposes and turn the power which he has put in our hands to the injury of others (Ezekiel 18:24). One of the trends of modern thought is in the direction of the relegation of the commandments to the realm

of outworn statutes. This is particularly evident in connection with the problem of marriage. Children should be taught from the very beginning by example as well as by precept that the marriage relation is beautiful and sacred and that anything which lessens our regard for it or makes us less fit to receive and enjoy its blessings should be avoided as a deadly plague. To know the beautiful teachings concerning marriage revealed through Swedenborg and then to yield to the temptation to treat the marriage vows lightly or to enter into other relations is like the sin of David.

If Nathan had come to David and charged him outright with his sin, David's immediate impulse would have been to justify himself in one way or another and perhaps to get rid of Nathan. But Nathan put the matter before David's own judgment in an impersonal way which left David's judgment free to see the simple right and wrong involved. There was nothing in the parable to touch David's self-love and so blind his judgment. And his judgment was immediate and clear. Then, when Nathan said, "Thou art the man," David realized that he had freely judged himself, and that whatever punishment came to him was just. This is exactly the way in which the Lord points out to us our evils by means of the Word. The Word presents to us in parable form every possible spiritual situation into which we may come, leaving us free to judge the right and wrong involved and to see the inevitable results of evil. Then, if we are listening to the prophet's voice, it says to us in each of our weaknesses and sins, "Thou art the man." If we store our memories with the letter of the Word and try to see its application to our lives, we are prepared to face our problems objectively and to judge justly.

The child of David's unlawful union with Bathsheba died. No living spiritual principle can come from the attempt to evade our obligation to obey the letter of the commandments, even in the interest of something which appeals to us as beautiful and which, if properly acquired, is innocent and good. Good does not come out of evil. But David repented. His fasting before the child died pictures our natural hope that the consequences of our sin may be

avoided. But once they have fallen and been accepted, we are shown that, like David, we must rise and begin anew, and that if we do, we may still use the bitter experience rightly and develop new strength.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, nn. 10801-10803: “The royalty itself is not in the person, but is adjoined to the person . . . The royalty consists in administering according to the laws of the kingdom, and in judging from justice according to these laws. The king who regards the laws as above him, consequently himself as below the laws, is wise; but he who regards himself as above the laws, consequently the laws as beneath him, is not wise. . . . he who regards the laws as beneath him, and thus himself as above them, makes the royalty to consist in himself, and either believes himself to be the law, or the law which is justice to be from himself; consequently he arrogates to himself that which is Divine, and under which he must be.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who was the second king of Israel? *David*
- P. Where was his home? *Bethlehem*
- P. What was his first occupation? *shepherd*
- P. Who anointed him? *Samuel*
- J. How did he come to Saul’s attention? *played lyre*
- J. How did he conquer Goliath? *sling and stone*
- J. Where did David first reign? *Hebron*
- J. How long did he reign there? *seven years*
- P. After he became king over all the land, what city did he take as his capital?
Jerusalem
- P. What precious thing did he bring there? *ark*
- J. What did he accomplish for Israel? *conquered all enemies*
- J. What sin did he commit? *took Bathsheba*
- P. Who was sent by the Lord to rebuke him? *Nathan*
- P. What parable did Nathan tell David? *rich man, poor man, one ewe lamb*
- P. How did David judge the man in the parable? *should die*
- P. Then what did Nathan tell him? *“Thou art the man”*
- J. How did David take Nathan’s condemnation? *repented (see Psalm 51)*
- I. Why did Nathan tell him the parable first? *to get unbiased judgment (also fear of his own life)*

- S. What is the difference in correspondence between (1) Saul, and (2) David?
- (1) *worldly idea of truth*
 - (2) *spiritual idea of truth*