

The Dark Knight

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

2nd in a three-part series

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2 Samuel 12:1-10 (NIV)

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

⁷Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’

Psalm 64 (NIV) 1-4, 10

¹Hear me, my God, as I voice my complaint;
protect my life from the threat of the enemy.

²Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked,
from the plots of evildoers.

³They sharpen their tongues like swords
and aim cruel words like deadly arrows.

⁴They shoot from ambush at the innocent;
they shoot suddenly, without fear.

¹⁰The righteous will rejoice in the LORD
and take refuge in him;
all the upright in heart will glory in him!

John 3:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to *save* the world through him.

*There is a darkness in the human heart.
Even if that heart beats in the chest of a superhero.*

Batman. The Dark Knight. Complex. Conflicted. Born out of a thirst for the revenge of his parents’ murder. No super-abilities, but lots and lots of really cool toys. Never really at peace with Gotham City. One minute, the city’s savior. The next minute, the city’s enemy number one.

Batman, seeking to right the injustices of a corrupt and murderous city, sets out to do good but finds that his own desires for anonymity and, perhaps, something much darker, drives him to some bad choices.

A story titled *Blind Justice* is about the lengths Bruce Wayne will go to in concealing his Batman identity and whether this identity is an outlet for his derangement rather than merely a force for good unto others. When his Batman identity is compromised and Bruce

is immobilized in a wheelchair, he sends a friend, Roy Kane, out in the Batman costume to fight Batman's battles for him. Roy is guided by a remote neurological device, meaning Bruce is essentially controlling his body like a puppet. Roy ends up falling off a building and dying, leaving his sister alone, broken, and never able to trust anyone again. Bruce put someone that trusted him, someone with no training or experience, directly in harm's way for the sake of keeping Batman's secrets.

Batman can't save Gotham City and seems unable to rescue even himself. When we consider Batman, the biblical figure that comes to mind is not Jesus, but David.

Deadly skill

Like Batman, David has no super-abilities. Nonetheless, he is able to perform mighty and wondrous deeds. When Israel is threatened by the Philistines and their giant hero, Goliath, it looks like Israel is doomed. Try to picture the scene as laid out in 1 Samuel 17.

The two armies face each other and out of the Philistine battle line emerges an enormous man, who seems as if he has to be ten feet tall. His armor weighs 126 pounds and yet, Goliath wears it with ease. He has a proposal which will save many lives. Let the Israelites pick their best warrior to face Goliath in a one-on-one battle. Whoever wins will be deemed to have won the entire battle for his king.¹ The losers, says Goliath, will become the slaves of the winners.

To a man, the response of the Israelite fighters is "Easy for him to say! He's unbeatable!" So day after day, Goliath comes out to make his challenge and each day the Israelites turn a deaf ear. Each day, the Israelites' humiliation grows. For forty days this goes on.

Meanwhile, young David is helping out his brothers who are part of Israel's army. So, despite enduring ridicule from his older brothers, David decides that he is going to take on Goliath and heads for King Saul to tell him. You can imagine Saul's reaction. David is hardly more than a boy with no experience as a warrior . . . and *he* is going to take on Goliath when the best of Israel's army refuse?

David persists however, confident that just as God enabled him to kill wild animals that threatened the sheep, so God will enable him to kill Goliath. This is the point on which the story turns. David is confident that God will see to the victory of his people over the Philistines, even if that means that one Israelite must defeat Goliath. This isn't about the skills of a particular warrior, but of God's faithfulness.

David's faith in God is unyielding and I guess Saul figures that he has nothing to lose. So Saul outfits David in his own armor – and the kid looks ridiculous. He can hardly carry the weight, much less move and fight in it. So David heads out dressed just as he came in, as a shepherd. No sword, no shield, just a trusty sling. David heads down the valley and stops alongside a stream to pick out a few suitable stones.

When David steps out to meet Goliath, the giant and his shield-bearer step forward and laugh in disdain. They send a boy?!! Goliath, wise in the ways of battle, promises to feed the boy to the birds. David's reply is equally confident. "You come to me with sword and shield, but I come with the LORD God who will deliver you to me."

So David ran to meet the Philistine, loaded a stone in his sling, and slung it, striking Goliath right in the middle of the forehead. The behemoth fell dead to the ground. David drew the dead man's sword and used it to cut off Goliath's head.

Batman could not have done a better job of it! . . . though he might have used a batsling.

¹If you happened to catch Brad Pitt as Achilles in the movie *Troy* a few years ago, you'll recall that this is exactly how the movie begins. Rather than two armies facing off, each chooses a hero to represent them. There is a useful analogy here to Jesus, who suffered death on a cross as our representative Messiah, one man standing in for us all.

When David returns to King Saul he is met by huge and adoring crowds cheering their rescuer. Everything is coming up roses. And David eventually becomes king. The king chosen and anointed by God. The king of promise and hope.

But like Batman, like us all, David is fatally flawed. Even in David, there is a darkness within.

The Dark King?

Here's the unadorned basics: David, now king and long married to Michal, has stepped out on his terrace one afternoon and sees a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing in her own home. He wants her. He sends for her; he is king after all. He takes her. He sends her away. . . . that's it. Read it for yourself. There is no hint of romance or love or goodness or morality. We were told earlier in the book Samuel that Michal loved David. Nothing like that here.

The only adulterer is David, who uses his power as king to forcibly take (yes, rape) a woman who is married to another man. He even knows who she is. He knows that her husband is one of his top commanders! Bathsheba is silent in the story until she informs David that she is pregnant. She is a victim of violence, not an adulterer. How could she refuse the king's summons? There is no indication that she knew why she had been summoned. Since her husband was one of David's commanders, the simplest guess would be that David simply wanted to talk to her about something. But not a single word of David's is recorded. He simply takes her.

And then . . . when she turns up pregnant, David makes another, even more terrible choice. He first tries to cover up his crime by having Uriah come home and sleep with his wife. And when Uriah refuses, David arranges for Uriah to be killed in battle. There is no good way to spin this. David chooses (there's that word again!) to murder Uriah, the husband of David's pregnant victim.

How could this be? Murder!? David is the man after God's heart. God looked at David and chose him from among all men. Through Nathan, God made an everlasting covenant with David (2 Samuel 7). All this is true, but it is also true that a darkness lies within David.

This doesn't make any sense, no sense at all. Perhaps that is why David's taking of Bathsheba is so often read as a lovers' affair, skipping over the murder of Uriah. Sure, Bathsheba went on to marry David, but with her husband dead, she had to marry someone, for nothing is ever said about sons. You could even interpret the law of Moses as requiring that if David has not brought the death penalty upon himself (as he probably has), he is at least required to marry her (see Deuteronomy 22).

How can I be so sure that this is a story of David taking? First, when the Israelites had clamored for a human king, Samuel had warned them that kings are takers. They'll take your sons, your daughters, your money, your livestock, Samuel said. King David took Uriah's wife and then his life.

But the more telling condemnation of David comes from the prophet Nathan, the same man as brought God's promise of an everlasting covenant. When Nathan finds out what David has done, he tells David a story of a rich man who "took" a poor man's lamb to serve to a guest. David is at first incensed by the story for he knows that the rich man is guilty, even saying he "deserves to die." Then Nathan thunders, "You are the man." David has become the taker, deserving of death. And God promises that the destruction David wrought in Uriah's household will fall on David's family. As the old saying goes, for David, it all goes downhill from here.

Our protector. Our rescuer.

What makes Batman so intriguing a character and so suitable for making superhero movies with substance is that he is complex, capable of doing what is right and what is wrong. IN

real life, David was such person. He was a God-filled person who still could surrender to the darkness that was encamped within him. So it is with you and me – with us all.

Hence, Batman cannot save Gotham. David cannot save Israel. You and I cannot save ourselves, much less the whole world. As David sang in psalm 64, we must seek refuge in God, for only God can rescue us. Indeed, it is God who has rescued us, for Jesus didn't come to this world to condemn it. He came to save it.

Is it romance or is Bathsheba “taken?”

If you've read the main text of this study, you know that I think this is a story of a king's “taking,” just as warned about by Samuel and just as in Nathan's parable afterward. But I'm sure that for many people, this is a surprising or even shocking conclusion. After all, this is David we are talking about! The following is taken from a commentary on the book of Samuel by Walter Brueggemann, widely acknowledged as one of the pre-eminent and most influential OT scholars working today.

David has been resting on his couch (v. 2). He was at leisure and saw what he wanted, a woman “very beautiful.” We do not know her name. David asks her name, but he does not measure the cost of his desire. He gets her name; her name is dangerously hyphenated: “Bathsheba—daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite.” She has no existence of her own but is identified by the men to whom she belongs. Now David knows who she is—and whose she is. David does not pause, however, because he is the king. The mention of Uriah might have given David pause, but it does not. David acts swiftly, as he has always done. He is not a pensive or brooding man but one who will have his way.

The action is quick. The verbs rush as the passion of David rushed. He sent; he took; he lay (v. 4). The royal deed of self-indulgence does not take very long. There is no adornment to the action. The woman then gets some verbs: she returned, she conceived. The action is so stark. There is nothing but action. There is no conversation. There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love—only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her. At the end of the encounter she is only “the woman” (v. 5). The verb that finally counts is “conceived.” But the telling verb is “he took her.” Long ago Samuel had warned that kings are takers (1 Sam. 8:11–19). Gunn (1975) calls it “grasping.” Mostly David has not had to take. He had everything gladly given to him by Yahweh, by Jonathan, by Abigail, by his adoring followers.

We have before us in chapter 11 a transformed David, however. Now he is in control. He can have whatever he wants, no restraint, no second thoughts, no reservations, no justification. He takes simply because he can. He is at the culmination of his enormous power.

In verse 5 the woman speaks for the first time. She says only two words, but they are utterly shattering: “I am pregnant” (*harah 'anoki*). David is not the last person to have his world shattered by this message. Nonetheless the world-shattering words of Bathsheba completely nullify the royal power of David. David had been in control. Now, in an instant, as long as this message takes, his control ends. Notice “the woman” makes no demand or threat. Her words say enough and say it all.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. The Dark Knight. An apt and intriguing title for Batman. The recent Christopher Nolan Batman film's transcend the superhero genre. It is a stark contrast with the Batman of Adam West or even Tim Burton. Why do you think Batman, more than other superhero characters, catches the imagination of creative types? Could it be Batman's complexity and the chance to explore dark themes?
2. In the study, I explore some parallels between Batman and King David. What other parallels do you see? To whom else in the Bible could Batman be compared?
3. Batman and David both made choices. Sometimes in life, choices that seem very important at the time turn out to be pretty inconsequential. What are some decisions you've made in your own life that seemed huge at the time, but in hindsight, really weren't very significant? On the other hand, sometimes small choices sneak up on us and we fail to see the consequences of our decision? What are some examples, from your own life, of small decisions that turned out to have big consequences? How can we get better at making the choices God would have us make?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

This week's passages all focus on choices made by people in the Bible.

<p>Monday, Genesis 16 Sarai wants an heir for Abram and she takes matters into her own hands.</p>	<p>Tuesday, Joshua 2:1-24 Rahab chooses to help some strangers and becomes a hero of the faith.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Job 2:1-10 Job chooses to keep his trust in God.</p>	<p>Thursday, Luke 19:1-10 A rich tax-collector, Zacchaeus, chooses to make a complete commitment to Jesus.</p>
<p>Friday, Acts 5:27-42 Peter and the Apostles choose to defy the Jewish leadership a second time.</p>	<p>Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

