



# Nathan

## THE PROPHET

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**N**ATHAN THE PROPHET, WHO WAS HE? What is known about him? This article will attempt to answer these questions. To distinguish this Nathan from other Nathans in Scripture, he is referred to as “the prophet Nathan” (2 Sam. 7:2). He lived and served as a prophet during the reigns of David and Solomon.

The name “Nathan” translates a Hebrew word meaning “gift” and is a shortened form of the Hebrew name meaning “God has given.”<sup>1</sup> This name may indicate that God had given him His word to proclaim. In biblical days a person’s name had a more significant meaning than it does today. Parents in our day choose a name for various reasons. In biblical days, however, a parent chose a name to identify a desire for who a child would become.

Scriptures spotlight Nathan in three primary events during the reigns of David and Solomon. A look at these events helps us discover more about Nathan.

### David Plans

David considered the fact that he lived in a nice “cedar house” (v. 2),<sup>2</sup> but the ark of God was still located in the Tabernacle surrounded with curtains. David desired thus to build a permanent house for the ark, which seemed like an honorable endeavor. Nathan the prophet’s first response to David’s plan was, “Go and do all that is on your mind, for the LORD is with you” (v. 3). The Scriptures give no indication, though, that Nathan had consulted God before making this declaration.

Nathan probably went home feeling good about David’s plans to build a new place for the ark of God. But God had

a different response and revealed His will to Nathan in a vision that night (vv. 4-17). God told Nathan that David was not to build a permanent house for Him. Since the days when He led His people out of Egypt, God had dwelt in a tent. Nathan was to tell David that God had never asked anyone among the Israelites, “Why haven’t you built me a house of cedar?” (v. 7). God seemed to be telling Nathan that he had no right to bless David’s desire to build the Temple. Only God had the right to decide when, how, and where His house was to be built.

Then God gave Nathan another message for David. The first message could have been discouraging, but not this message. Nathan was to tell David that God would “make a great name for you like that of the greatest on the earth” (v. 9). God promised to protect David and the people of Israel. God continued by using a play on the word “house.” God told Nathan to tell David that He would make a house for him. God declared that from the lineage of David would come One whose throne would be established forever (v. 13), a promise that we know was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. God continued, giving Nathan an exciting word for David. God promised to be a father to David’s descendant; He would discipline him when he did wrong, but He would also love him with a faithful love that would never be removed. God’s promise was that David’s house, kingdom, and throne would endure forever (vv. 14-16). What a message Nathan the prophet had the privilege of delivering to David!

### David’s Sins

Nathan the prophet had the responsibility not only of declaring good news but also of confronting David concerning his sin (12:1-25). David had received a wonderful blessing and promise from God. David, though, was not perfect. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had attempted to hide the sin by arranging for the death of her husband, Uriah (11:1-27). Nathan confronted David and told him of God’s judgment.

Nathan had the ability to present God’s message in a manner that David could easily understand. He told David a simple story about a rich man who took a pet lamb from a poor neighbor to prepare a meal for a traveler who stayed with the rich man. The rich man had many sheep and cattle, but the poor man had only this little ewe lamb.

Upon hearing the story, David became angry! He thought Nathan was relating an event that had occurred in his kingdom. David’s response was that “the man who did this deserves

**Below: From the palace of Sargon II, who ruled Assyria about 721-705 BC,**

**the relief shows boats transporting cedar logs that had been cut in Lebanon.**

**Bottom: A modern replica of the ark of the covenant.**

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ G.B. HOWELL/ LOUVRE MUSEUM (35/19/57)





Below: Artist's rendering of a Hittite warrior. David had Uriah the Hittite sent to the front lines of the battle so he would be killed in combat.



ILLUSTRATOR ART/JOHNNY SHUMATE

to die!" (12:5). He further said the rich man must repay four lambs for the one killed.

Then Nathan had to say to David, "You are the man!" (v. 7). Although God had blessed him beyond measure,

David was not content with what he had; he took Bathsheba the wife of Uriah. Then he had Uriah killed. Nathan boldly confronted the king with his sin.

Without excuse, David responded to Nathan's message by saying, "I have sinned against the LORD" (v. 13). Nathan's final message to David included the pronouncement that the child of Bathsheba would die, that God took away the confessed sin, and that David's life would be spared. When Nathan had completed his message, he went home.

### Solomon's Accession

Nathan had significant involvement in making sure Solomon served as Israel's next king (1 Kings 1:11-40). David was advancing in age. Knowing his father's death was imminent, Adonijah decided to have himself proclaimed king. He planned a banquet and had himself declared king. Nathan, who was not invited to the banquet, came to Bathsheba, David's wife, with the news. She, with Nathan's help, intervened by going to David who declared that Solomon, not Adonijah, was to follow him as king.

David had Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada take Solomon to Gihon riding on David's mule, a sign of claiming the throne.<sup>3</sup> In this act, all

the people knew that Solomon was to be king of all Israel and Judah.

### Some Closing Thoughts

These three events picture Nathan as David's close spiritual advisor. We know of at least one occasion when he spoke before consulting God, but when God corrected him, Nathan was willing to set things straight. He knew that God's plans were always right. He could admit his mistakes and correct his own advice—even to King David. He could stand boldly in the king's presence and confront him with his sin without fear because he understood that he was God's spokesman, not the king's. Nathan never took the easy road, but always stood strong and faithful in his place as the prophet of God. While allowing Adonijah to take the throne from David may have been easier, Nathan knew this was not God's plan. He, therefore, took a stand and risked his life to see that God's plan was fulfilled.

As God's prophet, Nathan understood that God's Word and will were more important than man's. First Chronicles 29:29 refers to Nathan writing about the reign of David; 2 Chronicles 9:29 speaks of him writing about Solomon's reign. Unless these writings are part of other Old Testament books, they are lost.

1. "Nathan" in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, rev. ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 998.

2. Unless stated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

3. See the 1 Kings 1:33 study note in the CSB Study Bible (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 504.

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In Amman, Jordan, visitors approach the ruins of a Byzantine church, which was constructed inside what had been the citadel at ancient Ammon. Uriah the Hittite was killed while storming the citadel at Ammon.

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