

Digging Deeper: The Greater Meaning of 2 Samuel 12:13

Sunday, September 27, 2026

In 2 Samuel 12:13, King David answers the prophet Nathan's piercing words, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7), with no excuses. He admits his guilt at once:

"David then said to Nathan: 'I have sinned against Jehovah.' Nathan replied to David: 'Jehovah, in turn, forgives your sin. You will not die.'"

(New World Translation)

To uncover the spiritual gems in this brief exchange and in the accompanying Watchtower excerpt, it helps to look at both the original Hebrew wording and the broader Scriptural context.

1 “I Have Sinned Against Jehovah” (*chata’ti la-YHWH*)

In Hebrew, David’s confession is just two words: חָטָאתִי לַיהוָה (*chata’ti la-YHWH*). The verb *chata’* (Strong’s H2398) basically means “to miss,” that is, to fail to reach a goal, way, or mark. Insight on the Scriptures points out that at Judges 20:16 the same verb, used with a negative, describes the Benjamite slingers: “Every one of these men could sling a stone to within a hairbreadth and would not miss.” Applied morally, sin is missing the mark that God himself has set.

Notice what David’s confession leaves out. He adds no qualifier and shifts no blame. Compare King Saul, who also said “I have sinned” but went straight on to his reasons: “because I feared the people and listened to what they said.” Later he said: “I have sinned. But honor me, please, in front of the elders of my

people.” (1 Samuel 15:24, 30) Saul was concerned about his image. David was concerned about his standing with Jehovah.

The words “against Jehovah” also matter. David had wronged Uriah, Bath-sheba, and the nation, yet he recognized that his sin was above all an offense against God. In Psalm 51, whose superscription ties it to Nathan’s visit, he wrote:

“Against you—you above all—I have sinned; What is bad in your eyes I have done.” (Psalm 51:4) This is the heart of “sadness in a godly way.” The NWT Study Bible note on 2 Corinthians 7:10 explains that such sadness “is the result of a person’s seeing wrongdoing as a sin against God.”

- **David’s awareness did not quickly fade:** “For I am well-aware of my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.” (Psalm 51:3)

- **His repentance came from the heart:** “A heart broken and crushed, O God, you will not reject.”
(Psalm 51:17)

2 “Jehovah, in Turn, Forgives Your Sin” (*he’evir chatta’thekha*)

Nathan’s reply, גַּם־יְהוָה הָעֹבֵר חַטָּאתָךְ, uses the Hebrew verb *‘avar* (Strong’s H5674), whose basic meaning is “to pass over” or “to cross over.” Here it appears in the causative (Hiphil) form *he’evir*, literally “caused to pass.” The Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon lists this verse under the meaning “cause to pass away, take away,” with sin as the object. The NWT footnote on this verse gives the picture: “Or ‘lets your sin pass by.”

The same verb appears in Saul’s confession, where he admitted that he had “overstepped” (*‘avar*) the order of Jehovah (1 Samuel 15:24). Sin oversteps a

boundary God has set, and forgiveness is Jehovah causing that sin to pass away from the sinner. Micah uses the same root when he praises Jehovah as the God “pardoning error and passing over the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance.” (Micah 7:18)

Nathan then added: “You will not die” (*lo tamuth*). Under the Mosaic Law, adultery carried the death penalty: “The one who commits adultery with the wife of his fellow man should be put to death without fail.” (Leviticus 20:10) Jehovah, who reads hearts, mercifully set that penalty aside for the repentant king. David celebrated the relief: “Finally I confessed my sin to you; I did not cover my error. . . . And you pardoned the error of my sins.” (Psalm 32:5)

Forgiveness did not erase every consequence, though. Nathan went on: “Nevertheless, because you have treated Jehovah with utter disrespect in this

matter, the son just born to you will certainly die.” (2 Samuel 12:14) Jehovah had already declared: “Now a sword will never depart from your own house.” (2 Samuel 12:10)

- Divine forgiveness restores our relationship with God, but it does not always remove the painful results of what we have done.
 - Accepting those results without bitterness is part of genuine repentance.
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3 Humbly Accepting Correction and Moving On

The daily text points to a second king. After Jehovah answered Hezekiah's prayer during a life-threatening illness, “Hezekiah did not respond appreciatively to the good done to him, for his heart became haughty.” Even so, “Hezekiah humbled himself for the haughtiness of his heart.” (2 Chronicles 32:25, 26) The Hebrew verb

rendered “humbled himself” is *kana’* (Strong’s H3665), which properly means to bend the knee, bringing low what once stood proud. As a result, “Jehovah’s indignation did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” In the end, the record says that “he kept doing what was right in Jehovah’s eyes, just as David his forefather had done.” (2 Kings 18:3) Jehovah judges us by our overall course, not by a lapse we have repented of.

The Watchtower paragraph applies this to counsel from congregation elders, “even on a seemingly minor matter,” and notes that “even the good kings of Israel were not above receiving counsel and reproof.” Hebrews 12:6 says: “For those whom Jehovah loves he disciplines.” The Greek verb here is *paideuō* (Strong’s G3811). The NWT Study Bible notes that the term “discipline” in this context “was often used with regard to training, correcting, and chastising children.” Correction is evidence of fatherly love, not of

rejection. Hebrews 12:11 adds: “True, no discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but it is painful; yet afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

The paragraph’s three steps match what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:

- **Respond humbly:** The Corinthians were “saddened into repenting.” (2 Corinthians 7:9) The Greek word *metanoia* (Strong’s G3341), “repentance,” signifies “a change in thinking, attitude, or purpose” (NWT Study Bible note on 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- **Make the necessary changes:** Their godly sadness produced “earnestness . . . yes, clearing of yourselves, yes, indignation, yes, fear, yes, earnest desire, yes, zeal, yes, righting of the wrong!” (2 Corinthians 7:11)

- **Move on:** “Sadness in a godly way produces repentance leading to salvation, leaving no regret.” (2 Corinthians 7:10) Once Jehovah has let a sin “pass by,” we do not need to keep carrying it.

Key Spiritual Reflections on Repentance and Counsel

- **Confession Without Qualifiers:** When I am corrected, do I respond like David, simply saying “I have sinned,” or like Saul, adding “because” and “but”?
- **Seeing Sin as Jehovah Sees It:** Is my regret mainly about embarrassment or consequences, or about how my conduct affects my friendship with Jehovah (Psalm 51:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10)?

- **Welcoming Counsel as Love:** When elders give me counsel, even on a small matter, do I see it as proof that “those whom Jehovah loves he disciplines,” rather than as rejection (Hebrews 12:6)?
- **Moving On in Wholehearted Service:** Once I have repented and made changes, do I trust that Jehovah has truly let my sin pass by, and do I ask him, as David did, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:12)?