

With his men Nathan brought back thirty-eight Levites and 220 temple servants (Ezra 8:18–20). He may be the same Nathan, descendant of Bani, who is mentioned in Ezra 10:39 as one of the returnee Israelites who rejected his foreign wife according to the commandment of Ezra (White: 949).

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## Nathan (Prophet)

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Judaism
- III. Islam
- IV. Literature
- V. Visual Arts
- VI. Music
- VII. Film

### I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

The prophet Nathan (MT *Nātān*; LXX *Ναθαν*) plays a key role in the narratives of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles concerning the life of David and the foundation of the Davidic dynasty.

Nathan first appears without introduction in 2 Sam 7 where he announces YHWH's promise to David of a royal house that will rule in Jerusalem forever. Although David had ruled in Hebron for seven years prior to his move to Jerusalem, Nathan did not appear among David's family or supporters during his Hebron years. Jones (59–92) argues that Nathan must have been a Jebusite prophet from the pre-Israelite population of Jerusalem, although there is little evidence to support such an argument. Oswald (275) argues that Nathan functions as the prototype of YHWH's prophets.

Second Samuel 7:1–17 presents the account of YHWH's promise to David of an eternal house. The narrative begins in vv. 1–3 with an account of David's request to Nathan that he be able to build a house (temple) for YHWH. Nathan's initial response to David is affirmative. But vv. 4–16 follow with a vision report of YHWH's oracle to Nathan in which YHWH declines the offer of a house (temple) and instead promises a house (dynasty) to David. YHWH, in this oracle, makes several major points: (1) YHWH has travelled with Israel, protected Israel, planted Israel in its place, and established leaders; (2) YHWH will create an eternal house (dynasty) for David so that his sons will rule after him forever; (3) YHWH will punish David's sons when they do wrong, but will never withdraw support from David's house as YHWH did with Saul. The narrative concludes in v. 17 with an account of Nathan's compliance in speaking YHWH's words to David.

Scholarly study of this narrative establishes that the language and concepts of this passage are drawn from ancient suzerainty treaties (Calderone: 9–71)

and that it appears to function as a land grant (Weinfeld: 184–203). Although early scholars argued that the promise of an eternal dynasty to David was a Deuteronomistic concern (McCarthy: 131–38; Cross: 274–89), statements in 1 Kgs 2:1–4; 8:15–26 and 9:1–9 that David's sons will rule forever only if they observe YHWH's commandments indicate that the promise of an eternal covenant is an earlier concept from the history of David's rise (Grøn-bæk: 11–278) that is qualified by the Deuteronomistic History (Nelson: 99–118; Sweeney 2007: 15–20; for another view see Rückl who considers the text as a Deuteronomistic invention legitimating the continuity of the Davidic line after the destruction of the temple).

First Chronicles 17 presents a somewhat reworked and esthetically-ordered account of Nathan's interaction with David. First Chronicles 17:10b–14 promises only that YHWH will secure the throne of David's son, Solomon (see esp. 1 Chr 17:14; contra 2 Sam 7:16). Such a move resolves the tension in 2 Sam 7 between the eternal dynastic promise and the qualified promises in 1 Kgs 2:1–4; 8:15–26; and 9:1–9 (Sweeney 2020).

Second Samuel 10–12 presents the account of David's Aramean wars, his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, his role in the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite, and Nathan's condemnation of David and its consequences in 2 Sam 12:1–25. Nathan appears before the king to describe a case in which a rich man took the lamb of a poor man to prepare a feast for his friends. When David stated that the rich man should die, Nathan condemned David for his actions. As a result, Bathsheba's baby died at birth, but David repented, was forgiven by YHWH, and Bathsheba later gave birth to Solomon who would go on to become the next king of Israel, thereby securing David's line. Most scholars still follow Rost in considering this narrative to be a part of the so-called Succession Narrative or Court History in 2 Sam 9–1 Kgs 2, which recounts the conflicts among David's Hebron-born sons that resulted ultimately in Solomon's accession to the throne (a different view is adopted by Van Seters, who considers that this story is part of a late post-Deuteronomistic anti-Davidic redaction). The setting of the narrative is disputed, although the Josianic edition of the DtrH is a likely candidate insofar as Josiah – and not David – appears as the ideal monarch of the Davidic line (Sweeney 2007: 15–20).

Finally, Nathan appears in 1 Kgs 1 in which David's son by Haggith, Adonijah, attempts to claim the Davidic throne. But Nathan colludes with Bathsheba to convince David that he had indeed named Solomon as his successor. David therefore names Solomon as the next King of Israel. This narrative is also considered a part of the so-called Succession Narrative or Court History, insofar as it explains how Solomon rises to David's throne to become the true founder of the royal House of David.

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## II. Judaism

■ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval Judaism

### A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

The prophet Nathan plays a pivotal role in the account of David’s life and the establishment of the Davidic dynasty, as is recounted in 2 Sam 7–12, 1 Kgs 1, and 1 Chr 17. However, he does not receive widespread treatment in many Second Temple Jewish writings. For instance, Nathan is not mentioned by name in any of the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls nor is his persona cultivated in any regard. When other Second Temple/Hellenistic Judaic texts do mention him, they typically mirror the treatment he receives in what became the HB/OT. For instance, in Ben Sira’s “Praise of the Fathers” section wherein central figures of Israel’s history are recounted, the text merely states, “Nathan rose up to prophesy in the days of David” (Sir 47:1).

In Josephus’s *Antiquities*, however, we do see some significant differences in Nathan’s account as compared to the story in the MT. Not only do we get a conflation of the Samuel–Kings and Chronicles accounts in Josephus’s portrayal of the Davidic covenant, but Josephus goes so far as to retell and rewrite the narrative with an apologetic tone that better fits the period under Roman rule (Avioz: 17). Josephus’s account betrays his concern for the hermeneutical issues surrounding the account of 2 Samuel, such as God forbidding David to build a temple and the nature of the duration of the covenant (ibid.: 9). Josephus harmonizes 2 Samuel with

Chronicles in order to make clear that God did not necessarily disapprove of David building the temple, but rather due to the blood he had spilled, Solomon had already been chosen for the undertaking (ibid.: 12). Furthermore, Josephus makes clear that in 2 Sam 7:12, when God states through Nathan, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom,” this verse applies directly to Solomon (Ant. 7.93), rather than having any eschatological implications. Many commentators have noted that this depiction was most likely due to the fact that Josephus did not want to be charged with inciting a Jewish rebellion against Rome (Avioz: 15).

In this regard, Josephus’s understanding of the Davidic covenant stands in sharp contrast to most other Second Temple texts. While these other texts do not mention Nathan by name, Nathan’s central proclamation (that of the Davidic covenant) does indeed receive much attention. Texts such as the Psalms of Solomon, 4 Ezra, the Aramaic *Levi Document* (Testament of Levi), the Damascus Document, the Testimonia, and most notably 4Q174, have a more eschatological understanding of the Davidic covenant (Nickelsburg/Stone: 159–72). For instance, 4Q174 suggests, through multiple exegetical techniques (most notably the “pesher”), that 2 Sam 7 does, indeed, point to “future royal heirs” and the idea of an eternal kingdom (Dimant: 272) to be realized at “the end of days (Wise: 106), along with “the promise of a future, divinely designed temple” (Mroczek: 523). While there are few explanations as to why the character of Nathan has fallen by the wayside in these texts, Mroczek has argued that Second Temple writings (most notably Chronicles) tend to highlight David’s prophetic identity, in that he is not sanctioned to build the temple but he is sanctioned to receive and transmit the word of God to others (ibid.: 528). In doing so, Nathan’s purpose is diminished, as his prophetic ability has been rendered redundant.

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### B. Rabbinic Judaism

The biblical character Nathan the Prophet does not appear frequently within Second Temple literature. The rabbis do not generally accord Nathan the Prophet much significance beyond the stories appearing in the HB/OT. They cite several such stories, including the passage where he rebukes King David

for his sins but assures him that he will live (2 Sam 12:13; SifDev 26) and the passage where he declares a son will be born named Jedidiah (2 Sam 12:25; SifDev 352; bSan 20b, 69b). The rabbis interpret Nathan's conversation with David explaining why he cannot build the temple (2 Sam 7:5; 1 Chr 17:4; 1 Chr 22:8–9) in various ways, including that he spilled much blood and that if he built the temple it could never be destroyed, leaving God to destroy Israel (MidTeh). Midrash Shemu'el (ch. 26) notes that Nathan was informed by God that he must act swiftly in informing David not to build the temple before David hired workers or made an oath to commence the construction.

Nathan's role as an early prophet is underscored in the Jerusalem Talmud (ySot 9:12), where he is presented as one of the "first prophets," following whose death augury through the Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:30; Neh 7:65) ceased. In two places, classical rabbinic texts do enhance Nathan the Prophet's role. In the Talmud's recounting of biblical authors (bBB 15a), Nathan is said to co-author (along with Gad the Prophet) the parts of the book of Samuel following its eponymous author's death. Seder 'Olam Rabbah (ch. 20) notes that Nathan (again, along with Gad) worked with David in planning the temple that was ultimately to be built by Solomon.

In more apocalyptically tinged literature, Nathan has an increased role. In some versions of the Midrash Abba Gurion on Esther's description of the ornate royal throne room (*parashah* 1), Nathan flanks the king (with Gad on the other side). Most strikingly, in the 7th-century apocalyptic work *The Book of Zerubbabel*, Nathan the Prophet appears as the husband of Hefzibah, the mother of the messiah, although he himself plays no major role.

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### C. Medieval Judaism

Medieval Jewish exegetes were especially troubled by the prophet Nathan's behavior when David approached him about building the temple (2 Sam 7). At first he said yes, but later God told him to say no. Can a prophet lie or be mistaken? Yefet ben Eli (10th–11th cent.) and later also Isaac ben Samuel al-Kanzī (11th–12th cent.) wrote that building the temple seemed like a good idea at first and an appropriate way to get closer to God, and therefore Nathan welcomed the idea on his own, not as a prophet. Only later did God inform him that David would not be allowed to build the temple. David

Qimḥi (ca. 1160–1235) was of the opinion that Nathan considered David to be a righteous king whose actions were supported by God, and therefore he welcomed David's idea of building the temple, without being told so by God. Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides; 1288–1344) said that Nathan did not give David explicit permission to build the temple, but just told him in general terms that he can do whatever he likes and that God supports his actions. Later he told him that he would not be allowed to personally build the temple and that this would be done by his successor. Joseph ibn Kaspi (14th cent.) refers the reader to what he said in *Gevia' kesef*. He is probably referring to his opinion that words uttered by prophets always come true, but not always in the expected manner (Herring: 38). Therefore, Ibn Kaspi's approach was probably similar to that of Gersonides. Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508) wrote that Nathan considered David himself to be a prophet, and therefore he believed that David had received a divine order to build the temple. Nevertheless, Nathan only spoke in general terms, so that David would understand that his support for building the temple was only his personal opinion, not a word of prophecy.

Some medieval commentators paid attention to Nathan's rhetorical approach when he came to admonish David for his adultery with Bathsheba, particularly his use of the parable of the poor man's ewe lamb (2 Sam 12:1–4). Yefet ben Eli was of the opinion that Nathan deliberately presented the parable as a judicial case, so that David, accustomed to deal with such cases, could pass sentence on himself. Abarbanel wrote that Nathan purposefully phrased the parable in such a way that it wouldn't reflect the story of David and Uriah perfectly, so that David would not become suspicious and refrain from convicting himself.

The exegetes also paid attention to Nathan's efforts to make Solomon heir to the throne (1 Kgs 1). Yefet said that Nathan decided he should intervene in the matter because God had told him that Solomon would be the heir, and Nathan knew that Adonijah would kill Solomon and Bathsheba if he could. Abarbanel wrote that Nathan had prophesied that Solomon would be king, but prophecies do not come true unless people strive to realize them, and like any other prophet, Nathan wanted his prophecy to come true.

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### III. Islam

Nathan does not appear explicitly on the Qurʾān. An admonishing parable that Nathan delivers to David (2 Sam 12:1–7, 13), however, does appear in a different form in the S 38:21–26. In the biblical parable, a wealthy man unjustly seizes the sole ewe of a poor man in order to serve it to a traveler. While David is told the account in the Bible, in the Qurʾān he is present for the accusations since the two disputants have gained entrance into his sanctuary to plead their case. David then judges directly over the affair. In dispensing judgment, David realizes that this is a test from God prompting him to seek God’s forgiveness directly. Nathan’s intermediary role is entirely absent in the Qurʾān.

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### IV. Literature

■ General ■ Modern Hebrew Literature

#### A. General

The reception in literature of Nathan the prophet has necessarily depended upon the master narrative of King David in which the prophet plays an important role.

The main literary interest in the figure of David occurred in the late 16th–17th century. John McBryde has collated the many instances of the David narrative being turned into drama or poetry, culminating in the English poets Abraham Cowley’s *Davideis* (1656) and Thomas Ellwood’s *Davideis: the Life of David, King of Israel* (1712). Cowley’s work was unfinished and deals only with the early part of David’s life. McBryde’s listing demonstrates that the main literary interest of the time was the fight against Goliath and the Absalom rebellion, neither of which concern Nathan. There are some instances of the Bathsheba incident, which does involve Nathan as the confronter of David’s sin, but none of the crowning of Solomon, thus *The Story of David and Berseba* (1635) and *David’s Troubles Remembered* (1638). It was left to Handel to focus on the latter in his *Coronation Anthem*, written in 1727 for the coronation of George II but performed at nearly every British coronation since.

The most famous piece of literature of the period on David is John Dryden’s satire *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) which omits any reference to Nathan. Lessing’s drama *Nathan der Weise* (1779, *Nathan the Wise*) might appear to be relevant, but in fact the figure of the wise Jewish merchant of Jerusalem, Nathan, was by most accounts modeled on Lessing’s friend, Moses Mendelssohn, and not the biblical figure. The one point of similarity is the use

of allegory to make the main moral point. Lessing uses the allegory of the three rings to demonstrate the likeness of the three great monotheistic religions.

However, as Tony Tanner argues, adultery is a central theme in fiction, perhaps the central theme, and with the rise of the novel, so interest in classical patterns of adultery grew. Often in early fiction, as in Restoration drama, adultery was treated comically, but tragic treatments, especially of secret sin, grew in the 19th century. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is a powerful expression of the psychological drama of unconfessed sin, being as intense as David’s own expressions of repentance in the Bible. The adulterous pastor Dimmesdale even has a tapestry of Nathan confronting David in his study. However, it has been argued that the lack of equivalence between the biblical figure of Nathan and Hawthorne’s doctor/confessor Chillingworth is his way of critiquing the Puritan legalistic mindset that condemns mercilessly. Chillingworth is a leech, sucking the life out of Dimmesdale; Nathan gives release and promise of a new future.

The discovery of adultery features largely in novels by Charles Dickens and George Eliot. In *Bleak House* (1856) the exposer is not a prophet but the more modern figure of a detective, Inspector Bucket, as well as a series of low-life individuals keen on blackmail. The outcome is tragic. In George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1872), Bulstrode’s sin is financial rather than sexual, and his exposure comes again by a low-life character intent on blackmail. Eliot’s point is the inevitability of exposure to all secret sin masked under a veneer of righteousness. Arthur Miller’s dramas *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *The Crucible* (1953) are more modern examples of the theme: again, a Nathan-like figure is lacking. There is no underlying belief that sin can be revealed prophetically, only the consequences of that sin through the writer as prophet.

The other main incident in Nathan’s life is his forbidding David to build a temple but promising him an eternal dynasty (2 Sam 7). Few attempts have been made to cover this in a literary way. One of them is by the modern rap artist Ti Birtzloff, whose main critique is of Christian leaders who put their resources into building “temples” rather than realizing under the new covenant, that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Birtzloff’s stance is prophetic, the message prophetically expressed in a reconstruction of the lost book of Nathan.

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### B. Modern Hebrew Literature

In Modern Hebrew Literature the prophet Nathan serves as a secondary figure, as in the biblical narrative. Modern writers mention him in conjunction with their treatment of King David: the story of Uriah, Bathsheba, and David (2 Sam 12:1–16), and in the context of the struggle over David's succession (1 Kgs 1).

In some works Nathan is described favorably, as a moral individual, loyal to God who sent him, and in others negatively, as a manipulating politician, or even a false prophet.

Yitzhak Katzenelson's play *Amnon* (1937) integrates Nathan's parable of the poor little ewe lamb and the story of Amnon's love for his sister. Nathan is faithful to God, who sent him on his mission, and refuses David's demand to bless those whom God did not command him to bless. Nevertheless, he shows empathy for David, who confesses his sins to him and asks him to admonish him. In this play Nathan, obeying natural morality, represents the secular-humanist concept according to which God "dwells in the heart of man."

Also in Yaakov Fichman's poem "Eivel David" (1948, David's Mourning), Nathan is described as a moral individual faithful to his creator; he "curses" David as is demanded of him, but at the same time he loves him and prays daily that the curse be removed. Nathan feels that there is no distinction between the fate of the cursed and that of the curser: Ever since the day he cursed David, God never appeared to him in his dreams.

Later works criticize Nathan. The poem "Qinah le-Beit Shaul" (1951, A Lament for the House of Saul) by Zalman Shneur criticizes Nathan for his restraint in condemning David's crimes. In the case of his adultery with Bathsheba, the offense was so great, that Nathan refused to forgive David and used his parable to chastise him.

In other works Nathan is described as involved in political intrigue; the historical novel *Me'im Qarnot Hamizbeah* (1958, *From the Horns of the Altar*) by Yaakov Hurgin, describes a political conspiracy contrived by figures close to David, Nathan among them, in order to transfer the kingship from Adonijah to Solomon.

In the play *Keter Barosh* (1969, A Crown on the Head) by Yaakov Shabtai, Nathan is also characterized as a politician. This play describes David's last days, when Bathsheba and Nathan insist that David promised that his son Solomon would rule after him, while Abiathar the priest and Joab the military commander support Adonijah (see 1 Kgs 1). Against the background of conspiracies and palace intrigue, the aging king, lusting after Abishag the Shunammite, is described as refusing to give up his throne. Some critics regard the play as a parable on regime change in the modern State of Israel. This play, in which King David is described as frivolous, was

screened on Israeli television, and aroused a serious polemic in the State since it was seen as offending public sensitivities.

The popular novel *Melakhim Gimmel* (2008, Kings III), by Yochi Brandes, is structured like a detective thriller, and Nathan is cast as a false prophet, who seeks to become the "Court Prophet." In Brandes's version, the story about the infant born to David and Bathsheba after their sin, who died as divine punishment, never happened at all. Bathsheba did not become pregnant, but she and David pretended that she did in order to gain the support of the people. The parable of the poor little ewe lamb, by means of which Nathan chastised David for his sin, was no more than "media spin." In a post-modern spirit, the novel casts doubt on the reliability of "the King's scribes," who were responsible for historic writing, thus disclosing the tendencies of biblical stories written by the "Establishment."

The most outstanding biblical story associated with the prophet Nathan is the parable of the poor little ewe lamb, in which Nathan surprised King David and declared to him "You are that man!" There are some works in which this parable takes a central part, while Nathan himself is mentioned only briefly or not at all. The historical novel *Kivsat Harash* (1956, The Poor Little Ewe Lamb) by Moshe Shamir, is written in the form of an imaginary diary by Uriah the Hittite in the course of the last five nights of his life, in which he gradually discovers that he became a victim of King David's passions. In the novel Uriah's scrolls end up in the hands of his comrade, Ahimelekh the Hittite, who added an "Epilogue," describing what transpired after Uriah's death, and published them. Ahimelekh expresses his hope that people of his nationality and others, will read the scrolls and "judge" history. According to him, for the Hebrews the divine wrath cast on David, through Nathan, suffices. "Will a day come when the Hebrews will read the story of Uriah the Hittite as well?"

In Rachel Blubstein's poem "Kivsat Harash" (1928, The Poor Little Ewe Lamb) the concept of the "poor lamb" becomes a metaphor that stands on its own. The poet expresses in this poem the feeling that love was stolen from her, just as love was stolen from Uriah the Hittite by King David. In Yehudah Amichai's poem that opens with the words "And all the women said," Abishag the Shunammite declares: "I am the poor lamb that rose from the parable," and in another poem in the same series, that opens with the words "King David loves Bathsheba," the words "You are that man" become a central motif that emphasizes the concept of the "poor lamb" (1989, *Patuah Sagur Patuah*; Amichai: 52 and 55).

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## V. Visual Arts

The prophet Nathan, together with the prophet Gad, are important prophetic figures in visual art. Both are visualized not only as messengers of God, but also as opposing the king and transmitting the punishment of God. An angel usually accompanies Gad while Nathan stands alone in front of King David. However, a clear distinction between the two prophets is not possible in every case.

One of the oldest depictions of Nathan can be found on a fragment of a marble basin, 3rd–4th century (Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 200.54.A). It shows Nathan approaching David who is kneeling on the ground. Nathan admonishing David can be found in Byzantine as well as Western manuscripts. Very often the scene is used as an illustration of Ps 51. In the 9th century Corbie Psalter (Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale MS 18), David and Nathan are shown eye to eye. A similar scene is reproduced in a capital in the Abbaye Sainte-Marie-Madeleine of Vézelay (12th cent.).

In some cases the depiction of Nathan standing in front of David could also refer to the so-called Nathan oracle in 2 Sam 7, in most of the cases however David is shown penitent and therefore the scene clearly refers to 2 Sam 12:1–15a. The whole story of 2 Sam 12:1–15a is visualized on the verso of the Psalter cover of Charles the Bald (Psalterium Caroli Calvi, 9th cent., Paris, France, BnF, MS Lat. 1152, ivory relief). The upper row shows Nathan admonishing David. On the left side Bathsheba is listening to them. The lower row visualizes Nathan's parable showing the poor man with only one sheep on the left side and rich man with many sheep on the right. In between these two scenes lays the dead corpse of Uriah. A very similar arrangement can be found in the Utrecht Psalter (early 9th cent., Utrecht, Netherlands, Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht, MS Bibl. Rhenotriactinae I 32, fol. 29v). It is probably the oldest manuscript that has survived with this iconography in the West.

The compositions in Byzantine art are similar. One of the the earliest examples of the iconography of David rebuked by Nathan can be found in the Chludov Psalter (9th cent., Moscow, State Historical



Fig. 22 "Nathan rebuking David" (11th cent.)

Museum, MS D.129, fol. 50r). The depiction in the lower part shows how Uriah was killed in the battle. Thus adultery and murder by the biblical king are likewise represented. Other examples such as the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (9th cent., Paris, BnF, MS Grec 510, fol. 143v) or the so-called Paris Psalter (10th cent., Paris, BnF, MS Grec 139, fol. 136v) took up the iconographic tradition.

In the depiction in the Bristol Psalter (11th cent., London, British Museum, MS 40731, fol. 82v; see fig. 22), Nathan is standing before the penitent David, Bathsheba listening to them in the background. The Morgan Picture Bible presents the story of 2 Sam 11–12 in ten images. The last picture on fol. 42v shows Bathsheba with Solomon on her knees on the left and Nathan admonishing David on the right side (13th cent., New York, Morgan Library & Museum, MS M. 638, fol. 82v).

The topic occurred frequently during the late Middle Ages. It was visualized in *Book of Hours* (e.g., Bamberg, Germany, 13th cent., New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 739, fol. 17v.; Rouen, about 1500, Getty Museum, MS 58r), the *Bible moralisée* (13th cent., Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 270b, fol. 154r) and the *Weltchronik of Rudolf von Ems* (e.g., around 1300, St. Gallen, Switzerland Kantonsbibliothek, Vadianische Sammlung, VadsI MS 302, fol. 178v).

Typologically David stands vis-à-vis the repentant Mary Magdalene and Miriam's penitence before Moses (e.g., *Biblia Pauperum*, ca. 1471–75, Nuremberg, Herzog August Bibliothek, 4 Xylogr. 2–13). In the *Speculum humanae salvationis* (e.g., 3rd quarter 15th cent., Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt, qu. 100, fol. 15r) the scene appears together with Magdalene washing Jesus's feet, King Manasseh penitent, and the return of the prodigal son. In the Pilgrimage Church of the Wies (1745–54, Bavière) the depiction of Nathan and David is just below a fresco of Jesus and the Woman taken in adultery (John 8:1–11). The scene showing Nathan admonishing David was clearly used for moral purposes and was visualized in cycles illustrating the ten commandments (e.g., Baron Henri de Triqueti, 1837, bronze bas-relief panel on the door of the Place de La Madeleine, Paris, France).

The topic of Nathan rebuking David continued to be popular throughout the Renaissance and Baroque epochs. It is debated whether a lunette in the Sistine chapel, Rome, refers to that scene. Doubtlessly the topic occurs in Italian (Francesco Pesellino, 15th cent., Le Mans, Musée de Tessé; Palma il Giovane, first quarter of the 17th cent., Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) as well as in German art (Matthias Scheits, 1672, Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle; unknown artist, 1730/1740?, Mülheim [Mosel], Lutheran church; Andreas Meinrad von Au, ca. 1748, Haigerloch, Sankt Trinitatis Church). It was, however, especially popular in the Netherlands. There are more than eight sketches by Rembrandt and his school offering different versions of the same scene (see Kipfer: 693–94).

Nathan is sometimes shown as a counsellor and partner in dialogue, but sometimes also as a very angry and aggressive judge, bringing David to his knees. Examples of such an aggressive depiction in later times would be a depiction by Henry Fuseli (ca. 1772, Private collection, courtesy of Aroldo Zevi Limited, London) or by Angelica Kauffmann (ca. 1797, Bregenz, Vorarlberg museum).

Doubtlessly Nathan is most frequently shown admonishing David (for medieval examples see Hourihane: 223–27, for the early modern period see Kipfer: 489–516). There are, however, other scenes showing how Nathan interacts in Salomon's succession to the throne (1 Kgs 1). One of the oldest examples for this iconographic tradition can be found in the the Ripoll Bible (Farfa Bible; Catalonia, 11th cent., Vatican City, Bibl. Apost. Vat., cod. lat. 5729). Further there were engravings from early modern time visualizing the senile David on one side and Solomon on the other in between Nathan and Zadok gesticulating. A very famous example is an engraving by Aegidius Sadeler (1570–1629) after a drawing by Maarten de Vos. It was taken up on textiles, majolica, and sealing frescoes (e.g., Graz, Eggenberg Castl). From the 19th century, there exists a painting by Frederick Goodall (1822–1904) showing a very old David lying on his bed and assisted by an almost naked Abishag. In front of them Bathsheba is kneeling on the ground raising her hands in supplication. While in the background the old prophet Nathan is observing the scene. In some rare cases Nathan is shown anointing Solomon (Philips Galle, after Frans Floris, Haarlem, *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 5601.010). In very few examples Nathan is depicted as a saint without any narrative context (e.g., cupola mosaic, 13th cent., atrium of St. Mark's Cathedral; stained glass window in the choir clerestory, Saint-Remi de Reims, Reims).

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Sara Kipfer

## VI. Music

As pointed out by Schipperges, there does not seem to be much reception of the prophet Nathan in music (Schipperges: 74). However, in some musical dramatic works, Nathan has been given a small but important role based on his intervention in the story of David and Bathsheba (see above "I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament"). In the book of Psalms, the *Miserere* (Ps 51 [50 Vg.]) is indicated to be "a psalm by David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba" (Ps 51, headline). Thus in the numerous settings of the *Miserere*, Ps 51 (see "Psalms, Book of VIII. Music") may be understood to indirectly reference the impact of Nathan's judgment on David. The oratorio *David poenitens* (The penitent David), by Ferdinando Bertoni (1725–1813) to an anonymous libretto, was performed in Venice in 1775 as an introduction to the *Miserere*. Its rather free rendition of the story of David and Bathsheba, however, has the prophet Gad in the (somewhat modified) role of Nathan (Smither: 3:138–40). Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's cantata  *Davide penitente* (Vienna, 1785) only gives vague paraphrases of psalms and includes no specific role from the story hinted at by the title, which, apparently, was decided on as an afterthought (Schick: 238).

Whereas Nathan in the music mentioned so far is at most indirectly referenced, he is present in some later musical dramatic works. Leneman, in her chapter on the story of David and Bathsheba (Leneman: 272–319), discusses David oratorios by Carl Reissinger (*David*, 1852) and George Macfarren (*King David*, 1883). Both include important roles for Nathan (Leneman: 281–87; for Macfarren, see also Dowling Long/Sawyer: 131–32). In Arthur Honegger and René Morax's oratorio *Le roi David* (King David), a concert version of Morax's theater play with music by Honegger (1921), first performed in 1923 with a much abbreviated text (compared to the play), Nathan is only mentioned in passing by the narrator (Morax/Honegger: 23; Smither: 4:659–61; Leneman: 287–88). Darius Milhaud's opera *David* (1954, to a text by Armand Lunel), on the other hand, includes a marked presentation of Nathan, characterized by the use of dodecaphonic (12-tone) music (Leneman: 294). Leneman also discusses Ezra Laderman's sacred music drama *And David Wept* (1971, libretto by Joe Darion). Here, Uriah mentions Nathan in a flashback scene (Leneman: 310).

John Butler's ballet with music by Carlos Surinach (1915–1997) for CBS television (1960; see Pizà) includes Nathan among its roles (Naya: 38). The more recent opera-oratorio *David and Bathsheba*

(2008), by Norwegian composer Ståle Kleiberg (b. 1958) to an English-language libretto by Jessica Gordon, also includes an important role for Nathan. Kleiberg's music drama was premiered in the Nidaros Cathedral (Trondheim, Norway) and on Norwegian State Radio (NRK) in 2008 and was also published in 2012 on CD (Ståle Kleiberg's website under "Works" ["Oratorio and Opera"]).

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Nils Holger Petersen

## VII. Film

The prophet Nathan does not have films or video games explicitly dedicated to him. When he appears in films and series, it is always in a secondary role, usually in the context of the larger biblical narratives on either King David, like *David and Bathsheba* (dir. Henry King, 1951, US), *King David* (dir. Bruce Beresford, 1985, UK/US), *David* (dir. Robert Markowitz, 1997, IT/DE/US), or King Solomon, like *Solomon and Sheba* (dir. King Vidor, 1959, US), *Solomon & Sheba* (dir. Robert M. Young, 1995, US), and *Solomon* (dir. Roger Young, 1997, IT/FR/DE/CZ/ES/US/NL/UK).

In the older installments, especially in *David and Bathsheba* and *Solomon and Sheba*, but also in the more recent *King David*, the figure of Nathan is placed in juxtaposition to the two kings he counsels. Nathan represents unquestionable faith and loyalty towards the God of Israel, leaving room for David and Solomon to develop a far more complex and morally ambivalent character. Henry King's Nathan, for example, is depicted as a strong if not rigid believer, while David seems to have a more pragmatic attitude towards the divine realm. Nathan, however, is, as was Samuel before him, a king-maker: he saves David from a mob trying to lynch their king for refusing to hand over Bathsheba to receive the death penalty for adultery (this episode does not exist in the HB/OT). This authority to make or break kings is a feature of Nathan in all his cinematic representations.

The juxtaposition of David/Solomon and Nathan makes the prophet the representative of a legalistic and institutionalized form of religion in past and present, the God and prophets of which are more concerned with cold justice and keeping the law, than with love and mercy. The two kings, on

the other hand, represent a more modern, individualized form of religion, where one's own conscience is the battlefield of conflicting obligations and passions. When Beresford's dying David speaks to his son Solomon for the last time, he stresses this sentiment: "Be guided by the instincts of your own heart, no matter what the prophets tell you. For it is through the heart, the heart alone, that God speaks to man." (This speech also differs from the HB/OT, where David exhorts Solomon to act according to the law of Moses (cf. 1 Kgs 2:1–5).

Even though Nathan's portrayal is usually a negative one when contrasted with the portrayals of David and Solomon, he sometimes appears as a kind of guru or theologian, eager to discuss divine matters with his kings. In Young's version of Solomon's life, Young lets the king ask Nathan if his life of celibacy is appealing to him: "Do you really think He meant you to deny yourself, Nathan? He made us this way did He not? Why would He not want us to taste the fruit?" Nathan replies with a reference to the idea of humankind's free will: "God put many things on earth we're not to taste, my lord. If it were not so, we would not have a free will. And He would not be God, but simply the creator of blind animals."

In Western cinema, Nathan is a secondary character at best, usually portrayed as stern and stiff in character, and used as a contrast to the much more complex and "human" characters of David and Solomon. David's and Solomon's criticism of institutionalized religion, represented by Nathan, is as much, if not more, directed towards the present day as it is towards biblical times.

Frank G. Bosman

See also → Bathsheba; → David; → Prophets, Prophecy; → Solomon

## Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome

Few biographical facts are known about Nathan ben Jehiel (1035–ca. 1110), who became head of the yeshivah of Rome in conjunction with his two brothers after the death of his father in ca. 1070.

Nathan ben Jehiel's fame rests on the 'Arukh (lit. "set in order"), a monumental lexicon of talmudic and midrashic vocabulary. Soon after its composition, the 'Arukh became a standard textbook in many parts of the Jewish world and was regularly consulted by Christian scholars in early modern Europe. Testimony to the 'Arukh's wide circulation are the more than sixty extant manuscripts and several Genizah fragments. The lexicon was first printed in Naples in ca. 1469 and many times thereafter, inevitably, with many additions and accretions; there were also several printings of an abridged version. The lexicon became the basis of Alexander Kohut's eight-volume *Aruch Completum*, to which fur-