

# PREACHING AS TRANSLATION VIA THEOLOGY

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*The homiletical undertaking is strikingly parallel to the transaction of translation. Both endeavors seek to render a text into a valid product—a new linguistic text in one, sermonic application in the other—that, while demonstrating relevance for a fresh setting, maintains the authority of the source text. It will be proposed that the key hermeneutical entity governing the validity of application in the homiletical translation from text to praxis is the theology of the pericope being considered. This entity, pericopal theology, will be defined, and its significant role in preaching delineated.*

## **Introduction**

Application is the culmination of the exercise of preaching, whereby the biblical text is brought to bear upon the lives of the congregation in a manner that seeks to align the community of God to the will of God for the glory of God. What is historical and distant (the text) is, in preaching, made contemporary and near (the praxis). Therefore, a fundamental issue for homileticians has always been the determination of application that is faithful to the textual intention (i.e., authoritative) and fitting for the listening audience (i.e., relevant). The one who is assigned the role of mediating the encounter between Scripture and God's people will, no doubt, confess to the arduous nature of the task of moving from the "then" of the ancient text to the "now" of the contemporary listener with authority and relevance. How does the preacher construct a bridge across this breach?

## **Texts and Distanciation**

Texts are unique communication acts, estranged from their authors, their maiden audiences, and the original circumstances of their composition. Writing has rendered the text somewhat autonomous—the phenomenon of distanciation (Ricoeur, 1981, pp. 145, 147). Interpretation seeks to counter this distanciation, a task aided by the fact that distanciation does not render the text utterly orphaned: it bears artifacts of the event of writing and traces of the author in its script, medium, content, arrangement, etc. Such residues are essential for interpretation, and are sufficiently present in most texts to establish the writer's purpose. At the same time, the physical absence of the writer at the point of the text's reception by the reader ensures that the scenario of dialogue no longer operates in textuality as it does in orality. For texts in another language, it is the translator that becomes the hermeneutic intermediary between text and audience; for the biblical text, the preacher serves that office. The proximity of such a mediator to the audience enables the former to regenerate the message of the text effectively for the latter. This is the role of both translator and preacher—human intermediaries between author and

readers/listeners, “rendering the communicative action of the script in new situations” (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 131).

## Translation and Preaching

Translation is derived from the Latin *trans* (“across”) and *latus* (“to carry”). The translator carries a text across a linguistic gap; the preacher, too, seeks “to carry across” the import of a passage of Scripture to a congregation across a communicational chasm. Both textual translation and biblical preaching attempt to demonstrate the relevance of a source text for a new setting. Both seek to render the source text into a valid product—a new text in a different language in one, fresh sermonic application in a different context in the other. This newness is the element of “novelty” in these enterprises of translation and preaching. At the same time, however, both activities strive to be faithful to the source text, seeking to maintain its authority. This is the element of “fidelity” in both endeavors. Novelty and fidelity thus work in tandem in both translation and preaching. Translation seeks to be faithful to the source text (to be “author”-itative), while at the same time attempting to render that text accessible to a reader, in the new language and idiom of the latter (to be relevant). In like fashion, generating application to stimulate life-change for the glory of God, the homiletician is charged not only to lead meaning *from* the biblical text with authority, but also to direct meaning *to* the situations of listeners with relevance. Thus “translation” is descriptive of both endeavors—linguistic translation and the preaching enterprise.

## Saying the Same Thing

Whether linguistic or sermonic, translation implies that the “same thing” is being said to a contemporary audience, i.e., that the translated product in either endeavor is faithful to the source text, thereby bearing authority. The purpose of both species of translation—linguistic and sermonic—is to say the same thing as the source text in the new context, thus conquering the remoteness between author and reader. Such a translation into a new context is not an option; it is necessary *in order that* the translated product may remain faithful to the original, saying the “same thing” as the latter (Lessig, 1992–1993, pp. 1165–1268). For instance, to disregard the change in the context of the text “12/2/1991” written in the U.S.A., but read in the U.K., would thoroughly mislead the reader: that sequence of digits, depending on one’s location vis-à-vis the Atlantic, could either stand for December 2, 1991, or February 12, 1991. In the U.K., the American text “12/2/1991” must be translated as “2/12/1991” in order for the reading to remain faithful to the conceptual core of the text—“the second day of the twelfth month of the year 1991 C.E. in the Gregorian calendar.” With regard to the interpretation and application of Scripture, Richard Hays declares that “[o]nly historical ignorance or cultural chauvinism could lead us to suppose that no hermeneutical ‘translation’ is necessary” for a contemporary audience to grasp the ancient biblical text (1996, pp. 5–6).

To say the same thing as the original text, then, is not merely its verbatim recitation. The core conceptual thrust of the text must be isolated, to which all of that text’s interpretations and applications must align, if one wants to say the same thing as the source. Any interpretative/translated product that maintains fidelity to this thrust of its source text may be considered as saying the same thing. And thereby distanciation, the result of textuality, is neutralized.

For the rest of this paper I shall focus first upon how one might conceive of this core thrust of the text, and then how to discover this critical element of the text that enables the interpreter to say the same thing, thus conferring fidelity (and authority), to sermonic application.

## The “World in Front of the Text”

Paul Ricoeur’s notion of the “world in front of the text,” provides a helpful category to understand the conceptual thrust of the text (1976, pp. 1–28; 1979, pp. 215–27). The text is not an end in itself, but the means thereto, an instrument of the author’s action of employing language to project a transcending vision—the world in front of the text. Literary texts are referential phenomena. One does not attend, for instance, a performance of *Macbeth* to acquire knowledge of the history of Scotland; instead, one goes to the play to learn what it is to gain a kingdom and lose one’s soul—the thrust of the text (Frye, 1964, pp. 63–4). Thus the text may not only tell the reader about the world *behind* the text (what “actually” happened), and about the world *of* the text (character, plot, rhetorical exigency, etc.—the assemblage of its literary elements), it also projects another world *in front of* the text that bids the reader inhabit it.

Consider a rather trivial example: *A* tells *B*, “Hey, you’re standing on my foot!” Clearly, the application for *B* in this utterance is to relocate from that traumatic station upon *A*’s anatomy. From an analytical point of view, that specific application is best discerned as being subsumed by the world in front of the text. While the sentence meaning (what the author *said*) asserted the spatial location of *B* upon the lower limb of *A*, the discourse meaning (what the author *did* with what was said) implicitly portrayed a world where *no one* would be stationed upon *A*’s lower extremities to produce distress—the thrust of the text: “I don’t want anyone, anywhere, anytime standing on my foot causing me discomfort!” (For the distinctions between sentence and discourse meaning, further expounded by Speech Act Theory and the field of pragmatics, see Kuruvilla, 2009.) The specific application to *B* is then an integral element of this world in front of the text, and *A*’s applicational intent for *B* being the alignment of *B* with such an ideal “nobody-ever-standing-on-my-foot world.” *B*, by moving the offending foot off *A*’s person, conforms to the demands of that world, thus “inhabiting” it. This world in front of the text is therefore the core thrust of that utterance from which application that is faithful to the source text may be discovered. It is obvious that this ideal world governs application not only for *B*, the one directly addressed, but for any who might consider standing on *A*’s foot at any time. Such a notion of the world in front of the text is, therefore, especially appropriate to the category of texts intended for application at times and places distal to their origin, especially religious and legal writings.

The construal of a text as an instrument projecting a world is particularly pertinent for religious discourse. Unlike other utterances, the inspired text of Scripture is unique in its subject matter: in, with, and through all that it says, the *A*/author projects a world that portrays God and the specific details of his relationship with his creation. That world is not necessarily the way the world actually *is*. Rather, depicting God and his relationship to his creation, it is a world that *should be* and *would be*, were God’s people to align themselves to it. The elucidation of the specifics of this world in front of the text is therefore an essential transaction in biblical interpretation, particularly interpretation intended to culminate in application, for that world, comprising the thrust of the text, provides a platform from which to develop faithful sermonic application (that says the “same thing” as the source text).

## Pericopal Theology

Scripture, then, displays to readers how God relates to His creation, by portraying a world governed by divine priorities, principles, purposes, and practices, and offers to the believer the possibility of inhabiting that world in front of the text by subscription to God’s values and obedience to God’s demands—a new way of living: God’s way. The biblical canon as a whole

projects this composite “divine” world. However, in the weekly homiletical transaction that moves the church towards inhabiting that world, it is the pericope that remains the most basic textual component handled. (While acknowledging its more common connotation of a portion of the Gospels, I employ “pericope” here to demarcate a segment of Scripture, irrespective of genre or length, that forms the textual basis for an individual sermon.) As the fundamental textual entity in ecclesial and homiletical use, and as a relatively irreducible scriptural element composing a single sense unit, each pericope projects a portion of that broader ideal world projected by the canon. Each pericope demarcates a segment of that plenary vision of God’s relationship with his creation, the details of which segment are unique to that text and are derived from its particulars. The cumulative projections of all the individual pericopes of Scripture therefore constitute the integrated, singular, canonical world. And to this world of Scripture, Christians are called to align their lives.

A biblical pericope, a literary instrument projecting a specific segment of the canonical world for God’s people, thus, invites readers/listeners to organize their lives in accordance with the particulars of this world-segment revealed in that pericope. Therein lies the utility of the projected world, for with its implicit future-directed intention, it makes possible valid application in contexts far removed from those of the original utterance or discourse: the distanciation that is intrinsic to textuality is thereby neutralized. Scripture is accorded the ability to speak its weighty matters to audiences and situations distant from the circumstances of its provenance. The preaching endeavor, then, must include the explication of this pericopal slice of the canonical world.

I propose to call that world projected by the text the *theology* of the pericope, inasmuch as it portrays God and the relationship he intends to have with his people. It is a world where kingdom priorities, principles, purposes, and practices are portrayed. Therefore it can rightly be called “theology”—“that skein of thought and language in which Christians understand themselves, the Bible, God, and their everyday world” (Holmer, 1978, p. 9). The theology of a particular pericope, then, is a specific segment of the larger canonical world; all such canonical segments together compose a holistic understanding of God and his relationship to his people. It is such a world that God graciously invites humanity to inhabit. Thus one might define *pericopal theology* as the theology specific to a particular pericope (the representation of a segment of the plenary world projected by the canon) which, implicitly bearing a future-directed intention, could conceivably function as the crucial intermediary—the element that enables one to say the “same thing”—in the homiletical move from text to praxis.

The interpretation of a pericope at any gathering of the community of God, then, must discern the particular portion of the canonical vision that that pericope features; in other words, each homiletical undertaking must delineate the theology of the pericope under consideration, elucidating what that specific text affirms about God and his relationship to mankind. What the pericope so affirms in its theology forms the basis of the subsequent homiletical move to derive application. Derived as it is from the text, the theology of the pericope forms the element of the text conferring fidelity (and thus authority) to sermon application that is subsequently derived from this intermediary. While the concept of theology as a bridge between text and sermon has oft been invoked in the past, what that theology comprises and how exactly it might perform its role has not been explicated (Ott, 1963, p. 17; Goldingay, 1981, p. 43; Stott, 1982, p. 137; Warren, 1991, pp. 463–86; Warren, 1999, pp. 336–56).

### **Pericopal Theology Distinguished**

Pericopal theology, in this conception, is neither the imposition of a systematic or confessional grid on textual data, nor the result of an exclusively historical or sociological focus on the subject

matter. Rather, it elucidates the textually mediated theological truth of the pericope at hand, attending to the contribution of that particular textual unit to the plenary canonical world displaying God and humanity rightly related to him. In this, pericopal theology differs from systematic or biblical theology (at least as they are commonly defined). Systematic theology pays attention to the entailments of what is written, drawing conclusions deductively from one text and integrating those with deductions from other texts (for instance, the assertion of the divinity of the Holy Spirit discovered from a number of biblical texts). By its integrative activity, it operates at a more general level than does pericopal theology. Pericopal theology, on the other hand, is more inductively derived, and is constrained by the specific thrust of that particular pericope. Biblical theology falls somewhere in between as it identifies the development of broader biblical themes across the canon. Therefore, its level of operation also tends to be more general than that of pericopal theology. The advantage of the greater degree of specificity that by definition constitutes pericopal theology is the possibility of moving from pericope to pericope, week by week, for those who seek to preach in that fashion. On the other hand, with systematic and biblical theology as the basis of sermonic preparation, if one chooses to preach pericope by pericope, clear distinctions between the sermonic aims of successive pericopes become harder to maintain. Operating as systematic and biblical theology does at a level of generality somewhat removed from the immediacy of the text and its details (at least at a level more removed from what I suggest ought to be with pericopal theology), contiguous pericopes will often tend to have similar thrusts, making *lectio continua* on a weekly basis virtually impossible to sustain without repetition of sermonic/applicational goals. On the other hand, given the degree of specificity prescribed by pericopal theology, preaching pericope by pericope would not be impeded by this handicap.

This is, of course, not to declare that sermonic application constructed upon systematic theology or biblical theology have no place in the homiletical calendar. My goal is simply to add another arrow to the preacher's quiver, one that will conceivably provide help to those keen on preaching pericope by pericope, progressively unfolding the world projected by the canon. Pericopal theology, I believe, will help such preachers bring that specific portion of Scripture to bear upon the situation of the hearers, thereby aligning the congregation to canon, God's people to God's Word. Week by week, and pericope by pericope, the community of God is thus gradually and increasingly (re)oriented to the will of God as it "inhabits" the canonical world segment by segment. Therefore in each such expository undertaking geared for application, homileticians, I suggest, might want to set the interpretive focus squarely upon the theology of the particular pericope utilized. Thereby, that one particular pericope chosen for a given occasion in the gathered church may be applied specifically.

The theology of the pericope thus functions as the bridge between text and praxis, between the circumstances of the textual inscription and those of the reading community. As a pericopal segment of the canonical world that displays God and his relationship to his creation, the theology of a particular biblical pericope enables the valid and legitimate translation from the "then" to the "now," from ancient text to modern audience, with fidelity—saying the "same thing." An illustration of the determination of pericopal theology follows, examining 2 Sam 11–12.

### **Pericopal Theology Illustrated: 2 Samuel 11–12**

While acknowledging the importance of the pericope as the fundamental textual unit of preaching, the homiletician may not deny the unity of the wider text of which the pericope is part. The segment of the world projected by the pericope is an integral element of the world projected by the larger body of text. In considering the collective corpus of 1–2 Samuel (the obvious background for the pericope of interest here), the theme of faithfulness to Yahweh is

found to be dominant. The results of unfaithfulness and the fruits of faithfulness are represented in the lives of the two kings whose individual dramas unfold in structured sequence—Saul and David (1 Sam 13–2 Sam 24). The entire monarchical establishment was a rejection of Yahweh; of note is his own assessment in 1 Sam 8:7—“they have rejected me from being king over them,” a unilateral abrogation of the Mosaic covenant whereby *God* was to be their ruler (Exod 15:18; 19:5–6). Regrettably, most of the kings would, themselves, recapitulate the people’s rejection of Yahweh, disdaining God’s word and dishonoring his name. This key principle of the world in front of the text is emphasized in the two hymns that bracket 1–2 Samuel (1 Sam 2:1–10, Hannah’s song; and 2 Sam 22:1–23:7, David’s hymn). In both, Yahweh is exalted for his exploits and his excellence; the blissful lot of the faithful is extolled, while dire consequences are predicted for unfaithfulness. This characterization of God implicitly affirms a practice of the projected world: *the one who rewards faithfulness with blessing must be trusted; the one who repays unfaithfulness with retribution must be feared.*

The result of David’s unfaithfulness, described in 2 Sam 11–12, was the dissipation of his authority and the attendant discord and disorder at home and in the land. David’s adultery and murder in this section consumes significant textual space, denoting its essential status as the *fons et origo* of the subsequent complications: incest, fratricide, rebellion, and civil war (2 Sam 13–20). To this specific text narrating the king’s misdemeanors, attention will now be directed scene by scene, to derive the distinctive theology of the pericope.

## 2 Samuel 11:1–13

A striking feature of the opening episode of the narrative (2 Sam 11:1–5) is the recurrence of the verb *šlh* (“to send”). Altogether in 2 Sam 10–12, this term appears twenty-three times, while in the larger unit of 2 Sam 9–20, it is utilized forty-four times; only thirteen instances occur in the rest of 2 Samuel. For the most part, it is the king who does all the sending. This repeated element, then, is a motif indicating regal power and authority, as David, supreme in his kingdom, sends people hither and thither; they all jump to do his bidding. The fateful sending, however, occurs when David decides to “send” for Bathsheba (11:4), signaling the start of an uncontrolled downward spiral.

Uriah, then, becomes the subject of David’s “sending” (*šlh*, three times in 11:6; also see 11:12, 14), another victim of the king’s power play, as David attempts to conceal his act of adultery. Engaged now in an ego-driven cover-up to defend his own name, he was more than willing to denigrate God’s name in the process (12:9–14). David’s selfish transactions with Uriah (and with Bathsheba who belonged to Uriah), callously undertaken and with an utter disregard for consequences, would haunt David, his family, and the nation for decades.

Here was a potentate abusing his power in the service of his immoral desires; indeed, this was power that was not inherently his, but that had been granted him in the first place. Yahweh, exercising his sovereignty, had chosen David from being a “nobody,” to replace a predecessor who had himself been warped by his own fantasies of omnipotence. David, exercising *his* “sovereignty,” had chosen to have his own way, not God’s. Such a conflict, developed further in the pericope, points to the theology of the text, portraying what readers and hearers should eschew at all costs. This pericope focuses particularly upon an individual’s shameless sensuality (and his abuse of power in its service). Instead, *faithful allegiance to God, the true sovereign, is the priority to which believers are called to be aligned, manifest in the reined exercise of power.*

Strikingly different are the reciprocal dealings of Uriah with David. Significant contrasts emerge between the Jewish king and the Hittite warrior as the narrative negotiates its nuanced

turns. Uriah, at the battlefield with the army, was engaged in war; David, at home, was engaged in illicit pleasure, lying (*škb*) with another man's wife (11:4). Uriah refused to succumb to the joys of rest and relaxation at home while his compatriots (and the ark) were encamping on open ground. This loyal soldier, instead, chose to lie (*škb*) at the door of the king's house (11:9), rather than go home to lie (*škb*) with his wife (11:11), as David was manipulating him to do. Later, even while inebriated, Uriah opted to "lie" (*škb*) with the servants of the king (11:13). On the one hand, was the king of Israel, unfaithful and disloyal; deliberately and willfully he had engaged in adultery with the spouse of one of his warriors, while all of those dedicated fighters, exemplified by the non-Israelite Uriah, were sacrificing themselves for their king and nation. On the other hand was besotted Uriah emerging more faithful to Yahweh, liege, and comrades, than was the sober and scheming David. Uriah is driven by loyalty, abstinence, and self-sacrifice; David, is shown to be disloyal, indulgent, and selfish. Through the depiction of Uriah, the faithful soldier who is requisitioned as a foil for the unfaithful king, the theology of the pericope depicts what is desirable in the world in front of the text—*faithfulness to Yahweh manifested in the restriction of one's self-indulgent passions*. The overarching moral fabric of 1–2 Samuel—commending faithfulness and condemning unfaithfulness—is again discernible in this particular portrayal of the protagonists of 2 Sam 11–12.

### 2 Samuel 11:14–27a

Even after Uriah is subsequently disposed of, the storyteller does not allow him to vanish from the narrative: in 11:26, the awkward recurrence of that soldier's name in "the wife of Uriah" and "Uriah her husband," and the repeated assertion in the same verse of Bathsheba's marital status keep the focus unwaveringly upon the innocent victim of David's egregious actions. The child that is born to this illicit union is also referred to as "the child that *Uriah's widow bore*" (2 Sam 12:15); Uriah reappears at the conclusion of the book as well (in 23:39). The narrator does not intend that the reader forget this shocking episode and, to the very end, this brazen malfeasance blacklists David. He who ought to have been, as Yahweh's earthly representative, the guardian of the people's rights and the upholder of their justice, murders his loyal servant and causes the death of several other faithful soldiers. The condemnation of David's deeds is almost palpable; unfaithfulness to Yahweh could not be more starkly depicted, and the attendant theology of the pericope could hardly be more explicit: *unfaithfulness to Yahweh is sorely displeasing to the divine sovereign*.

In light of the theology of 1–2 Samuel, one would expect this evil perpetrated by David to incur the wrath of Yahweh. However, quite strikingly, the narrative has thus far failed to make any mention of Yahweh. As the sin increases, so does the suspense—*When will Yahweh intervene?*

### 2 Samuel 11:27b

At last, the divine character in the *dramatis personæ*, Yahweh, makes his appearance. Following right after David has just cavalierly remarked to Joab (through a messenger, 11:25), "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes," the impact of Yahweh's riposte here could not be more striking. In the narrator's voice, divine disapprobation is registered in no uncertain terms (11:27b): "But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of Yahweh." There appears to have been a major discrepancy between what David was "seeing" and what Yahweh was "seeing". God and the king were not seeing eye to eye on this important matter. What David considered "not evil" was being expressly condemned as "evil" by Yahweh.

If David imagined that God was nowhere present, he was deluding himself (was he blind?). Not only was Yahweh implicitly present as David went about his nefarious activities, but Yahweh had

also seen! As if to rectify any misconception about the presence of deity on stage, from this point onwards, Yahweh, “absent” in the previous scenes, becomes almost tangible: the Tetragrammaton occurs thirteen times in 2 Sam 12, in the section that details the judgment, sentence, and punishment of the king. God himself would now take action to bring justice and closure to this sinister episode. The □nal verse of this section, 11:27, turns out to be the focal point of the chiasmic structure of 2 Sam 10–12, emphasizing the crux of the narrative—what God considered “evil in his eyes”.

10:1–19	A	War—partial victory over the Ammonites
11:1–5	B	Sin; Bathsheba conceives
11:6–13	C	Concealment of David’s sin
11:14–27a	D	Murder of the innocent Uriah
11:27b	E	Evil in the eyes of Yahweh
12:1–6	D’	Murder of the lamb
12:7–15a	C’	Exposure of David’s sin
12:15b–25	B’	Death; Bathsheba conceives
12:26–31	A’	War—complete victory over the Ammonites

For the development of the pericopal theology, this is an integral facet of the projected world: *faithfulness to God involves recognizing evil for what it is in God’s eyes*. As the subsequent section shows, David, instead, had despised God’s word and denigrated God’s name (12:9, 14).

That the climax of the narrative has been reached in 11:27b is also indicated in the very next verse (12:1) that has, for a change, Yahweh doing some sending (*šlh*) of his own, as Nathan is commissioned to play the prosecuting attorney.

## 2 Samuel 12:1–15

The juridical parable recounted by Nathan is sufficiently parallel to the situation that caused its telling as to be condemnatory in itself. In that denunciatory □ction, the poor man’s lamb would *eat* of his bread and *drink* of his cup and *lie* in his bosom (12:3). In light of these very same verbs employed in the protestations of Uriah (11:11), David, the narrator implies, was as callous as the rich man who slew the poor man’s favorite pet. Flying into a rage over the parabolic narrative, the king condemns himself. David passes sentence: the rich man deserves to die and he must make restitution for his callousness *fourfold*.

David, by his dastardly deeds, had scorned Yahweh and his word (12:9, 10). Yahweh had declared earlier: “Those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me will be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam 2:30). There was no excuse for David. Once more, the issue of eyesight comes up—David is again accused of having done evil in Yahweh’s sight (12:9). The punishment would now □t the crime: Yahweh would take David’s wives “in his sight” and they would be lain with “in the sight” of the sun (12:11). Even Yahweh’s “taking” (*lqh*, 12:11) would be a grim reminder to David of how he had taken (*lqh*) Bathsheba (11:4; 12:9, 10), just as the rich man had taken (*lqh*) the poor man’s ewe lamb (12:4). Perhaps at □rst glance, the punishment, including the death of *four* of David’s children (Bathsheba’s newborn, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah), might appear to have quantitatively exceeded the crimes. However, the scorning of Yahweh and his word is

heinous indeed, and that not by a private individual but by Yahweh's anointed himself, the king of God's chosen people (Israel/Judah is mentioned  $\square$ ve times in 12:7–15). The fact that these nefarious affairs had given occasion for the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme him (12:14) must also not be forgotten (Rom 2:23–24 underscores the seriousness of such an accusation). The repercussions of David's sin and crime—a rebuke to Yahweh and a reproach to the people—are felt far and beyond the confines of bedroom and palace. Thus the entire nation must witness the punishment (“before all Israel,” 12:12). In the theology of the pericope, *the corollary to the principle of faithfulness to God yielding blessing is the principle that unfaithfulness to him, manifest in the disrespecting of his word and the dishonoring of his name, will often get its just deserts.*

## 2 Samuel 12:15b–25

A remedial thrust is inherent in the narrative: if the ones being corrected were to repent and seek forgiveness, it would be granted them. David's response to correction is a helpful pointer to that called for in a reader seeking to inhabit the world in front of the text. The king confesses: “I have sinned against the LORD” (12:13b).

This unit begins with Bathsheba still continuing to be referred to as “Uriah's wife” (12:15), though at that point she was David's wife. However, at the end of the section, she becomes “his [David's] wife” (12:24) and conceives. David's sins take their tragic toll, but with this change in Bathsheba's ascription and the birth of Solomon, the accusatory unit ends positively. Once again Yahweh “sends” (*šlh*); once again it is Nathan, but this time with a message of tenderness: the child would be “beloved of Yahweh” (12:24). *While the consequences of the sin may remain, the theology of the pericope portrays a God who is willing to forgive the contrite sinner.*

## 2 Samuel 12:26–31

The bookend of the latter portion of the Ammonite war occupies 12:26–31. It is here that complete victory over the Ammonites is achieved. The irony of 12:27 is unmistakable: Joab “sends” (*šlh*) word to David that he should personally come and capture the city, lest he, Joab, take it and name it after himself. Four times Joab mentions that he had taken (*lqh*) Rabbah, the royal city (12:26, 27, 28 [twice]). Finally, David delivers the *coup de grâce*—he captures (*lqh*) it himself, and takes (*lqh*) the enemy king's crown. The king had stayed in Jerusalem; others had waged his war and won his victories; but now he gets to make a triumphant arrival, reap the fruits of his subordinates, and name the city after himself. Quite “a  $\square$ ttling  $\square$ nal note of ironic commentary on the tale of a king who steals a subordinate's wife and sees to it that she ‘be called after his name’” (Sternberg, 1985, p. 196). That sardonic summary emphasizes yet again the theology of the pericope: *deplorable is the self-indulgent “taking” for self-grati $\square$ cation without concern for God or man.*

## Summary: Pericopal Theology of 2 Samuel 11–12

In summary, the priorities, principles, purposes, and practices of the world projected by 2 Sam 11–12 reflect, in its narrower textual setting, many of the same theological elements projected by the book as a whole: faithfulness to God, respect for God's authority and rulership, blessing for faithfulness, and its withdrawal for unfaithfulness. A world is projected in which God's right to reign over his people through his chosen representatives is incontestable, underscoring, in turn, the priority of subjects to remain faithful to their divine ruler. The sin of David, the focus of the theology of this particular pericope, involves the abuse of power in the service of immoral

self-indulgence, resulting in his despising God's word and name. In its depiction of God as one who sees and labels evil for what it is, the pericopal theology warns of punishment for unfaithfulness. The consequences would be severe; forgiveness, though available, advanced by God, and accepted by sinner, does not completely erase the consequences. Yet, to the penitent, God offers restoration. The concrete narrative is thus a negative model of what the world in front of the text demands, what the pericopal theology calls for.

The theme of the righteous reign of Christ overarches 1–2 Samuel: this King, whom the OT adumbrates in this very corpus (2 Sam 7:12–16), and whom the NT calls in its very first verse “the Son of David” (Matt 1:1), would be a marked contrast to his eponymous ancestor, flawed and fallible. The Messiah alone would be absolutely faithful to his God, his comrades, and his community; he was the one who kept God's word and glorified his name, and who would “lay down his life for his friends” (John 8:55; 15:31; 17:4, 26). This grand theme of the faithfulness of the coming King forms the backdrop of the sorry story of 2 Sam 11–12: to be Christlike is to be faithful to God, as Christ was (and unlike David was).

Borne by the narrative is the theology of the pericope that calls upon God's people everywhere to demonstrate faithfulness towards him, particularly in such specific matters as dealt with in this text. Considering the story in its broader context, the theology of the pericope (the segment of the world in front of this text) may be summarized positively: *Reverence for God and deference to his word is manifested in the reined exercise of power, the restriction of self-indulgent passions, and the recognition of evil as reprehensible in the sight of God; this respect for the authority and rulership of the true sovereign brings blessing.* It must be remembered that, in the broad context of 1–2 Samuel, it was not only the nation's kings who were unfaithful. Even before the regents registered their infidelity, the people, in calling for a monarchy, had themselves rejected Yahweh (1 Sam 8:7). Therefore, the theology of this pericope is a lesson for both ruler and ruled, for both crown and commoner.

As is evident in the analysis and summary of 2 Sam 11, pericopal theology imparts to the textual particulars a significance that transcends the immediate historical circumstances of their origin. Ultimately, 2 Sam 11–12 (and, indeed, the entire Davidic saga in 1–2 Samuel) is more than a narrative about a historical personage, “but about the highest values in the narrated David (as shown or as violated by him) which are the same as those of our own human existence” (Fokkelman, 1981, 423–4). I suggest that the theology of the pericope is the ideological locus in which the priorities, principles, purposes, and practices of the projected world are propounded for appropriation by readers/listeners. This was not merely history that was being written; the author was projecting a world in such a way that the theological thrust of the pericope would be emphasized, allowing the past to flow over into the present. Application can now be undertaken in the sermon: the people of God are urged to align their lives to the details of the world projected—the theology of the pericope.

## Conclusion

In sermonic “translation,” infidelity to what has gone on before is essential, for the church remains under the authority of the text of Scripture and seeks to be faithful to it in its application. I have proposed that the element that confers infidelity in interpretation for application is the theology of the pericope (the world in front of the text, that enables one to say the “same thing”). Discovering this pericopal theology should therefore be an important goal of interpretation of all biblical texts, for it is *via* this critical intermediary that an interpreter can move from text to sermon, from authoritative inscription to relevant application.

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