

David and Bathsheba

Second Samuel 11:1-27

DIG: What significance do you see in the timing of David's sin? In the timing of Bathsheba's purification? Who tempted David? Could Bathsheba have prevented the seduction? Why or why not? Where does the passage record David's fear of adultery? What did David have to lose? What did Bathsheba have to lose? How could his attempted cover-up nullify his sin? What superior character qualities did Uriah exhibit in refusing David's overtures? What does this reveal about David? Uriah? Joab? As Joab's messenger, what would you think of the message sent to David? And David's response? What must Bathsheba have thought as her identity quickly changed from Uriah's wife, to David's fling, to Uriah's widow, to David's bride? David had broken the 6th, 7th, 9th and 10th commandments. How did one sin lead to another in this sad story?

REFLECT: What tempts you? Is it a sin, or merely fattening? What steps do you take to guard against that temptation? Have you recently faced that temptation and resisted it? Once virginity or fidelity has been lost physically, how can one start over spiritually? Where is your purification and forgiveness today? Go wash as God directs.

984 BC

We now come to a turning point in the books of **Samuel**, for **David** and **Isra'el** were at a moment of no return. From now on the life of **David** is marked, and all **Isra'el** had to live with that fact.³²² The story of **David** and **Bathsheba** has long aroused both dismay and astonishment; dismay that **King David**, a man after **God's own heart** (**First Samuel 13:14** and **Acts 13:22**) could stoop to such an act, and astonishment that the Bible tells the story with such relentless openness, although the person involved was **David**, the great and celebrated king, who foreshadowed the coming of the **Messiah (Mattityahu 1:1)**.³²³

The Occasion: In the spring, when the winter rains end and the ground begins to harden again, at the time when kings go off to war (usually around May), **David** sent his general **Joab** out with the king's men and the whole **Israelite** army. He laid waste the land of the **Ammonites** and went to **Rabbah** and besieged it to finish the war. The **Israelites** had defeated the **Syrian** army in the field, but had not taken the **Ammonite** city of **Rabbah** (**2 Samuel 11:1a**; **1 Chronicles 20:1a-3**). The incident with **David** and **Bathsheba** is closely interwoven with the account of the **Ammonite** war. But the biblical writer is more concerned with the man **God** chose to be king over **Isra'el** and the way **God** dwelt with him, than with **Isra'el's** impressive military victory or wealth.

But while others were being killed on the battlefield, David was killing time in Tziyon (Second Samuel 11:1c; First Chronicles 20:1c). In a lazy seemingly mood, in a moment when he was off-duty and alone, there came, to quote the words of Nathan, "a traveler" (Second Samuel 12:4), a thought, which led to a look, which developed into a gaze, which formed itself into action. When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each person is tempted by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:13-15).

The Adversary specializes in making sin popular. It's like he says, "Well, it doesn't really matter. That is what everyone does." The success of his strategy may be partly due to the fact that we have ceased to think about the horror of sin. I am quite sure that until we are prepared to put the label sin where YHVH puts it - and not taking our own opinion of it, but God's - and until our hearts are broken and we are brought to acknowledge before Him that we have failed, there will be no breaking through of the blessing of ADONAI. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Rom 5:20). So if we learn about the extent of David's sin, and we leave it at that, we have learned little, because we can already see it; but if we learn about the mercy of God, then we truly have learned something special.³²⁴

The Adultery: One evening David got up from his bed after his afternoon nap that is common in the Near East and walked around on the roof of the palace. It was then that the cool winds came in and it was a good time to take a walk on the rooftop . . . or to take a bath. The palace would have been built on the highest point of Mount Ophel. It would have given David a commanding view of the whole city of Jerusalem in that day and also the ability to see into many different courtyards. From the roof he saw a woman bathing in an open courtyard, assuming that no one could see her. The courtyard was often the location of a cistern, or a basin for collecting rainwater. An enclosed courtyard was considered part of the house, but it could be seen from David's higher elevation.³²⁵ Men, you can't un-see what you've seen. But you don't have to take the second-look. It was that second-look that got David in trouble. The woman was very beautiful (the Hebrew idiom adds to look at). The glance became a glaze. David's first step to sexual sin was that he did not turn away. And in his second step to sexual sin, David sent someone to find out about her (Second Samuel 11:2a).

The man said: She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, which means *the God of the people*. In First Chronicles 3:5 she is referred to as Bathshua and her father as Ammiel, which means *the people of God*, so the meaning was the same only transposed. And the wife of Uriah (Hebrew: YHVH is light) the Hittite (Second Samuel 11:2b-3), which means that he was a Gentile soldier in David's army (see Eo - David's Mighty Warriors) and a righteous man as we shall see. This probably meant that Bathsheba (Hebrew: perhaps *daughter of an*

oath) was also a *Gentile* and a *Hittite* like *her* husband. **They** both had Hebrew names that probably mean that either **they** or **their** parents were converts to Judaism.

Then **David** knew *who she* was . . . and *whose she* was. This did not deter **him**, however, because **he** was **the king**! The mention of **Uriah** should have given **him** pause. But it didn't. **David** acted swiftly, as **he** had always done. **He** was not a pensive or brooding **man**, but one who will have **his** way. **He** was in control. **He** could have whatever **he** wanted, no restraint, no second thoughts, no reservations, or no justification. **He** took simply because **he** could. **He** was at the culmination of **his** enormous power.

The verbs are as active as **David** was. **He sent . . . he took . . . he slept**. **David** ignored *her* personal feelings in the matter by **sending messengers to take her**. The facts are clear that **Bathsheba** was not pregnant when *she* came to him. **David's** adultery was then known by others who would view **him** as a hypocrite and damage **his** credibility in the government. **In his third step to sexual sin, David pursued after a woman he knew was married.**

The rabbis have come up with a whole theological frame of reference to justify **David's** actions. They cannot come to the point where they can admit that **David** truly sinned here. The rabbis teach that those who left for war would give their wives a bill of divorce that would allow them to marry if their husbands disappeared without a trace. They teach that when **David** sent messengers to find out about her in verse 3 all he was doing was making sure that such a bill of divorce had been given to **Bathsheba**. Allegedly, all he wanted to know was if she was divorced before **Uriah** left for war. So, in rabbinic thinking, **David** was not really guilty of adultery.

She came to him. There are some pages of the Bible where the white spaces scream louder than the black words of the text. This is one of them. **She** seems to offer no resistance. Was this out of vanity? Did **the king** like *her*? Or out of fear? We do know, on the one hand, that **she** loved **her husband** (see below); but on the other hand, **she** could be somewhat ambitious (1 Kings 1:11-21). In the final analysis, we just don't know.

Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face just as easily as anyone else (First Corinthians 10:12 The Message). The action that **David** was about to take didn't happen all at once. This lust was simply the climax of something that **he** had been cultivating in his life for about twenty years. After he left Hebron (see Ch - Sons Were Born to David in Hebron), **David** took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem (see Cp - Children Born to David in Yerushalayim), and more sons and daughters were born to him there (Second Samuel 5:13).

This was a direct violation of **God's** command. In Deuteronomy 17, **YHVH** laid down three specific *mitzvah* or *commandments* for the one who would be king over **His** people. There

were three things from which **he** had to abstain: **the king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself (Deuteronomy 17:16); he must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray (Deuteronomy 17:17a), and he must not accumulate large amounts of silver or gold (Deuteronomy 17:17b).** After defeating the Syrians, David captured a thousand horses, but in obedience to **God's mitzvah he hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses** by cutting the sinews of **their** hind legs so **they** could not be used for military action again (**Second Samuel 8:4**). And in obedience to the commandments of **ADONAI he dedicated** the spoils of war; **articles of silver, gold and of bronze** to help build the Temple (**Second Samuel 8:11**). But when it came to his sex life, **he disobeyed. David** had a lust problem.

Why did **Ha'Shem** make those three rules for **the king**? Because there is a price to pay for leadership; such a man (or woman) cannot afford to live as they see fit. If you would attain to any position of leadership in the congregations of **God**, you must recognize that there is a price to pay. Sometimes the price is loneliness, or other times it's being misunderstood. It may be something else, but one thing is certain: there is a price to pay for keeping your life transparently righteous before **YHVH**. On that issue **David** failed.³²⁶

And the fourth step to sexual sin, he actually slept with her. The royal deed of self-indulgence didn't take very long. The action is stark. There is no conversation. There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love - only lust. **David** did not call **her** by name. And as far as we can tell from the text he did not even speak to **her**. **She** was only **the woman**.³²⁷

You will notice that the Scriptures put the entire blame for the situation on **David**. It doesn't implicate **Bathsheba** at all. Before **the king** she was obliged to yield. **Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness**, showing that **she** was not pregnant at that time. The Torah did not allow for sexual intercourse until after **her** period was over and a ritual bath had been taken (**Leviticus 12:2 and 15:19-24**).³²⁸

The woman now got some verbs: **she returned . . . she conceived. Then she went back home (2 Samuel 11:4)**. What a walk that must have been? Guilt? Remorse? Satisfaction? Months passed. What a horrible position **he** had put **her** in worrying about being pregnant. Days of worrying passed into weeks, and weeks passed into months. After a few months she knew she was pregnant. Oh no! What am I going to do? **But then, the woman conceived and sent word to David, her only words in the entire narrative: "I am pregnant" (2 Samuel 11:4-5)**. Brief as **her** words were, they set in motion a course of action that would ultimately result in **her** husband's death. No mention is made of the agony and uncertainty **she** had suffered. Now it was **David's** turn to agonize.

Uriah's Righteous Actions: A cover-up appeared to **David** to be the obvious way to proceed. **So he sent this word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite."** And **Joab** sent him

to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet" which was the common practice of that day after arriving home. His plan, of course was to get Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife so that he would think the child was his. So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. What was Bathsheba doing during this time? Did she know anything about this plan? Or was she informed what would happen and expected to go along no matter what? But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house (2 Sam 11:6-9). Uriah knew where his duty lay and it was not with his wife. Oy Veh!

The rabbis teach that when Uriah rejected David's suggestion to go home, that showed that his primary loyalty was to Joab and not to David. They teach this was a sin on Uriah's part and he was branded a rebel, and therefore subject to the death penalty. So David wasn't really guilty of murder after all. His only sin was having Uriah killed on the battlefield instead of being tried by the Sanhedrin (see commentary on [The Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin](#)). And because Bathsheba was divorced, he really didn't commit adultery either.

The next day, David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So at the risk of arousing Uriah's suspicions, he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Y'sra'el and Y'hudah are staying in tents (Uriah's mention of the ark living in a tent shows that he was a convert to Judaism), and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife (Deuteronomy 23:9-10)? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing" (Second Samuel 11:10-11). Oy Veh all over again!

Then David, who remained too occupied with his problem to concern himself with moral issues, said to him, "Stay home one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk hoping to break down Uriah's self-discipline. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants, faithful to the king and his own integrity. He did not go home, thus sealing his own fate (Second Samuel 11:12-13). Déjà vu!

The Murder of Uriah: In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and had the *chutzpah* to send it with Uriah. As the net of David's sin widens, Joab then became an accomplice to David's murderous scheme. Consequently, David would have little to say about Joab's subsequent murders of Abner (see [Ci - Joab Murders Abner](#)), David's nephew Amasa (see [Ed - Sheba Rebels Against David](#)) and David's son Absalom (see [Dz - Joab Kills Absalom](#)). It would be left to Solomon to execute Joab for his crimes (see [Ep - David's](#)

Charge to Solomon Regarding Joab, Barzillai and Shim'i).³²⁹ In the letter he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is the fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will have to fight the Ammonite's by himself and be struck down and die." David wanted the letter to be kept a secret, yet ironically it has become one of the best-known letters of all time. Only the essential information is quoted; thus David handed over to Joab the murder of an innocent man.³³⁰ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell. Moreover, Uriah the Hittite died (Second Samuel 11:14-17).

To harmonize what happened here and what happened in verses 23-24 it is obvious that Joab changed some of David's original instructions. The Ammonites made a raid that was successful at first. Then Joab's forces drove the Ammonites back. Joab ordered his men to pursue the Ammonites as far as possible, even to the city gate. But this put them within the range of the Ammonite archers on the wall. So Joab changed some of David's instructions to carry out his ultimate goal . . . Uriah's death. David had instructed Joab to withdraw and leave Uriah to fight alone. But that would be too obvious to the army and too difficult to explain. Joab's decision might have been viewed as foolish, but not treacherous. So Joab's plan led to more loss of life. He knew that would make David angry, so he informed the messenger to tell David that Uriah was killed by Ammonite archers. Sin always takes you further than you wanted to go, and costs you more than you wanted to pay.³³¹

The Report to David: Joab sent David a full account of the battle. He instructed the messenger, "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, "Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez (Judges 9:15-57)? Why did you get so close to the wall?" If he asks you this, then say to him, "Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead" (Second Samuel 11:18-21).

The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open on their raid, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. This was the information that was of utmost importance to Joab as he came to grips with what had been demanded of him; the advance toward the gate, which exposed his soldiers to extreme danger from the enemy on the wall, causing more Israeli casualties. Unintended, but David was also guilty of these deaths. Joab was so concerned over this avoidable bloodshed that the death of Uriah seemed like the least of his concerns. In reporting those casualties to the king, Joab virtually blames David for the

heavy death toll. Then **he** added: **Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead” (2 Samuel 11:22-24)**. David exhaled slowly. Never mind about the rest of the report. The one thing that needed to be done was done. The pregnancy can now be explained away. **David** is free of the burden. The truth is concealed. The guilt has passed. The monarchy is saved.³³²

In his reply, **David** failed to express any of the anger that **Joab** thought **he** would show. Instead, **he** took the loss of life of his loyal soldiers in stride and viewed it as merely collateral damage. The cost of war. **David** refused to take notice of the inference that **he** had initiated the situation by his order to have **Uriah** murdered. **He told the messenger, “Say this to Joab, ‘Don’t let this upset you (as if speaking to himself), the sword (the fortunes of war) devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it,’ say this to strengthen Joab” (Second Samuel 11:25)**. So that is exactly what happened. The Israelites would leave Rabbah in ruins (see Dh - [The Capture of Rabbah](#)).

Then **David** took the crown from the head of their kings - its weight was found to be a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones - and it was placed on **David's** head. **He** took a great quantity of plunder from the city and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes. **David** also did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then **David** and his entire army returned to Jerusalem (Second Samuel 11:1b; First Chronicles 20:1b-3).

The Marriage of David and Bathsheba: When **Uriah's** wife, referred to not by name, but by status, heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him for seven days. At no point are we allowed to understand that **Uriah's** death was insignificant. **After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house.** In order to make the baby seem legitimate, **he** had to act quickly. **And she became his wife and bore him a son.** So about nine months passed between conception and the birth of **their child**. This would have given **David** time to think about what **he** had done and repent of his sin. But **David** didn't budge. Time passed. So far as appearances went, everything went on as before. Those government officials close to **the king** knew what injustice had been committed, and yet it went unpunished, though not for long, because **the things David had done were evil in the eyes of ADONAI (Second Samuel 11:26-27)**.³³³

The **sin** that **David's** lust had conceived was about to be born, a **sin** that would bring with it sorrow and **death**. According to **Proverbs 6**, **David** was about to be robbed (**Proverbs 6:26**), burned (**Proverbs 6:27-28**), disgraced and destroyed (**Proverbs 6:30-33**), for a moment of forbidden pleasure. Hollywood movies, television, and modern fiction use stories about **adultery** as a means of entertainment, which only shows how bad things have become. Famous people readily admit they've been unfaithful to their spouses, but it doesn't seem to hurt their popularity or their incomes. "No-fault divorces" simplify the procedure, but they don't prevent the painful emotional consequences of infidelity.

David and Bathsheba sinned against **ADONAI** (see commentary on **Exodus Dq - You Shall Not Commit Adultery**), for it is **ADONAI** who established marriage and wrote the rules to govern it. So serious was **adultery** in the nation of **Isra'el** that **both the adulterer and adulteress** were to be taken out and **stoned to death** (**Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24; John 8:1-11**). Yes, **YHVH** takes seriously the marriage vows brides and grooms make, even if they don't! **All should honor marriage, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral** (**Hebrews 13:4**).³³⁴