

Bathsheba

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This is the sad story of David's adultery, and then the murder he arranged to hide his adultery. Bathsheba is the woman of that story.

(a) 2 Samuel 11

In the spring, when the kings normally went out to war, David sent out Joab [the general, David's nephew], his servants [army officers], and all the Israelites [soldiers]... But David stayed in Jerusalem.

Early in David's service to Israel, he led the army in battle. Now (starting in 2 Samuel 10) we see that he stays home while the army goes out to fight for him. While this may make good sense -- to insure David's safety, and to allow him to watch over the affairs of state at home -- it also allowed him to become careless, and easily tempted.

During this time of battle, when Joab finally was getting near to complete victory, he stopped short, and called David out to finish the job, so David could get the credit:

2 Samuel 12:26-29

²⁶ Joab fought against Rabbah, a royal city of the Ammonites, and he was about to capture it. ²⁷ Joab sent messengers to David and said, "I have fought against Rabbah and have captured its water supply. ²⁸ Now bring the other soldiers together and attack this city. Capture it before I capture it myself and it is called by my name!"

²⁹ So David gathered all the army and went to Rabbah and fought against it and captured it.

Later, in another battle, David's officers advised him to stay away from the battle, for his own protection. (2 Samuel 18:3)

Now, back to our story...

2 Samuel 11

² One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of his palace. While he was on the roof, he saw a woman bathing. She was very beautiful.

Question: Did this woman know that David was watching her? Was she deliberately trying to tempt him? Or did she assume that, because it was night, and folks (including David) normally would have been asleep in bed, that she had a low risk of exposing herself? We don't really know. The fact that she cooperated with David in what happened next leads us to suspect that she may have exposed herself to David on purpose.

³ So David sent his servants to find out who she was. A servant answered, "That woman is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam. She is the wife of Uriah the Hittite."

Uriah was one of David's top army officers. (2 Samuel 23:29) And he was a Gentile from the area today we would call western Turkey. In times before David, the Hittites had extended their control and influence to wide empire, which included Canaan. Even though Uriah was from a Gentile nation, he adopted the faith of Israel, took an Israeli name (that means "My light is Yahweh - the Lord"), married a Jewish woman, and became a loyal supporter of King David.

David betrayed Uriah's loyalty and trust. David knew that Uriah was away, doing his military service on David's behalf.

⁴ So David sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to him. When she came to him, he had sexual relations with her.

Why didn't Bathsheba resist? Had she been flirting with David? Or did she give into him because David was the king and she was afraid of him? Later in Bathsheba's story we see that she was a strong-minded woman. She knew what she wanted, and she knew how to get it. We can safely assume that she was a willing partner in David's sin.

Incidentally, the story here does not report either the ages of David or of Bathsheba. But we can infer from facts that the Bible reports much later that Bathsheba may be several years younger than David.

(Now Bathsheba had purified [bathed] herself from her monthly period.)

...which meant that she was near her time of ovulation and could easily get pregnant

Then she went back to her house. ⁵ But Bathsheba became pregnant and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

Oops!

David tried to cover up his adultery by calling Uriah home from the battle. David hoped that Uriah would go to bed with his wife, they would have sex, and then later, when the baby is born, Uriah would not suspect his wife's adultery.

David first met with Uriah, pretending that he brought Uriah home in order to get a report about the battle.

⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go home and rest."

Uriah knew exactly what David meant, when he said, "...and rest" (literally, "wash your feet.")

... ⁹ *But Uriah did not go home.*

Instead, Uriah stayed in the staff barracks. The next day...

¹⁰ *Then David said to Uriah, "You came from a long trip. Why didn't you go home?"*

¹¹ *Uriah said to him, "The Ark and the soldiers of Israel and Judah are staying in tents. My master Joab and his officers are camping out in the fields. It isn't right for me to go home to eat and drink and have sexual relations with my wife!"*

Uriah was messing up David's plan! Again that night Uriah stayed with staff. On day three David invited Uriah to dinner, hoping to get Uriah drunk, so he would then go home...

¹³ *...but he still did not go home. That evening Uriah again slept with the king's officers.*

On day four David sent Uriah back to the battle with a letter for his commander:

¹⁵ *In the letter David wrote, "Put Uriah on the front lines where the fighting is worst and leave him there alone. Let him be killed in battle."*

Joab did as David asked.

²⁶ *When Bathsheba heard that her husband was dead, she cried for him.* ²⁷ *After she finished her time of sadness, David sent servants to bring her to his house. She became David's wife and gave birth to his son, but the LORD did not like what David had done.*

(b) 2 Samuel 12:1-25

God sent a prophet named Nathan - who was David's personal friend and advisor - to confront David about his adultery and murder. However, Nathan did not confront David directly, at first. Rather, Nathan told David a story about a rich man who stole a poor man's pet lamb, killed it, and served it for dinner.

⁵ *David became very angry at the rich man. He said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this should die!"* ⁶ *He must pay for the lamb four times for doing such a thing. He had no mercy!"*

⁷ *Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"*

Nathan reminded David what he had done with Bathsheba, and what David had done to Uriah.

To David's credit, he did not make excuses for his disobedience, as King Saul had done. He confessed that what he had done was wrong.

¹³ *Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”*

David expressed his remorse about his sins in a psalm, that is now very famous: Psalm 51. Notice the Hebrew title of that Psalm:

(c) Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to David after David's sin with Bathsheba.

And here is what David wrote:

¹ *God, be merciful to me
because you are loving.
Because you are always ready to be merciful,
wipe out all my wrongs.*
² *Wash away all my guilt
and make me clean again.*
³ *I know about my wrongs,
and I can't forget my sin.*
⁴ *You are the only one I have sinned against;
I have done what you say is wrong.
You are right when you speak
and fair when you judge.*
⁵ *I was brought into this world in sin.
In sin my mother gave birth to me.*
⁶ *You want me to be completely truthful,
so teach me wisdom.*
⁷ *Take away my sin, and I will be clean.
Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*
⁸ *Make me hear sounds of joy and gladness;
let the bones you crushed be happy again.*
⁹ *Turn your face from my sins
and wipe out all my guilt.*
¹⁰ *Create in me a pure heart, God,
and make my spirit right again.*
¹¹ *Do not send me away from you
or take your Holy Spirit away from me.*
¹² *Give me back the joy of your salvation.
Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit...*

Back to 2 Samuel 12:

In response to David's confession, Nathan gave him Good News: Forgiveness!

¹³ *...Nathan answered, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You will not die.”*

However, Nathan also had some bad news. First, Nathan said that there would natural consequences of David actions. The consequences of David's murder of Uriah:

¹⁰ Now there will always be people in your family who will die by a sword.

And the consequences of David's adultery with Bathsheba:

¹¹ This is what the LORD says: ... "While you watch, I will take your wives from you and give them to someone who is very close to you. He will have sexual relations with your wives, and everyone will know it."¹² You had sexual relations with Bathsheba in secret, but I will do this so all the people of Israel can see it."

The rest of David's life is a sad story of rape and murder happening in his own family, among his own children. His offenses against Uriah, Bathsheba, and God, were like spiritual seeds that grew in the lives of his children. And because of his own guilt in this matter, he felt powerless to confront it and correct it in his children.

The second piece of bad news that Nathan had for David:

¹⁴ But what you did caused the LORD's enemies to lose all respect for him. For this reason the son who was born to you will die."

David thought his sin was a secret. Wrong! The whole world knew about it! And what David did brought to Israel and to Israel's God. It is no different today when TV preachers are caught in scandal. Non-Christians mock the church and they mock Christ.

The pagan world knew that the God of Israel was a holy God -- very different than their "gods." The God of Israel required that His people live in a way that reflects His character.

Gentile leaders were watching. What would Israel's Holy God do because of David's sin? God's reputation was at stake. For that reason, God must show the Gentiles that, yes, what David did was wrong and that God will not tolerate it.

The baby became very sick. David grieved, fasted, and prayed for healing. But this time God did not change His mind. The baby died. (2 Samuel 12: 15-23)

²⁴ Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife. He slept with her and had sexual relations with her. She became pregnant again and had another son, whom David named Solomon. The LORD loved Solomon.²⁵ The LORD sent word through Nathan the prophet to name the baby Jedidiah [meaning: "Loved by the Lord"], because the LORD loved the child.

Most of David's life reported in the rest of 2 Samuel is the sad story of the consequences of David's adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah.

1. David son Amnon, raped his half sister, Tamar. Part of Amnon's plot involved deceiving his father, David. (2 Samuel 13:1-22)

2. David did nothing about it, so Tamar's full brother, Absalom, killed Amnon. Again, part of Absalom's plot involved deceiving his father, David (2 Samuel 13:34-39).
3. David cut off all communication with Absalom. (2 Samuel 14)
4. Absalom won the support of many Israelites in a revolt against his father, David (2 Samuel 14 & 15).
5. Absalom put a tent on the roof of the palace, where everyone could see, and he had each of David's concubines brought to him for sex (2 Samuel 16:21-22) ...just as Nathan had predicted (2 Samuel 12:11)
6. Absalom is killed in battle. (2 Samuel 17)

None of these stories involve Bathsheba.

(d) 1 Kings 1:11-31

The Bible mentions Bathsheba again near the end of David's life. David now is old and weak and confined to bed.

David's oldest living son was Adonijah. He was in a hurry to become the next king. He won the support of David's general, Joab, and the high priest who had previously been loyal to David. They held a big coronation party. David's friend Nathan, the prophet, heard about the plot.

¹¹ When Nathan heard about this, he went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. "Have you heard that Adonijah, Haggith's son, has made himself king?" Nathan asked. "Our real king, David, does not know it. ¹² I strongly advise you to save yourself and your sons.

When someone became king through a revolt, he often killed all possible competitors... including his own family, or in this case, half-family. Bathsheba and her sons (including Solomon, the favored one) were in great danger.

Bathsheba and Nathan both went to David to immediately to report Adonijah was hosting a big party to make himself king and that he didn't invite them, or other family and staff still loyal to David, and that they were all in danger. Bathsheba also reminded David that he had promised that Solomon would be the next king. (1 Kings 1:13-27)

David ordered that they crown Solomon the next king immediately.

³³ "Take my servants with you and put my son Solomon on my own mule. Take him down to the spring called Gihon. ³⁴ There Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet should pour olive oil on him and make him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' ³⁵ Then come back up here with him. He will sit on my throne and rule in my place, because he is the one I have chosen to be the ruler over Israel and Judah."

They did as David directed. Adonijah's party came to an immediate end.

⁴⁹ Then all of Adonijah's guests were afraid, and they left quickly and scattered. ⁵⁰ Adonijah was also afraid of Solomon, so he went and took hold of the corners of the altar. ⁵¹ Then someone told Solomon, "Adonijah is afraid of you, so he is at the altar, holding on to its corners. He says, 'Tell King Solomon to promise me today that he will not kill me.' "

⁵² So Solomon answered, "Adonijah must show that he is a man of honor. If he does that, I promise he will not lose even a single hair from his head. But if he does anything wrong, he will die." ⁵³ Then King Solomon sent some men to get Adonijah. When he was brought from the altar, he came before King Solomon and bowed down. Solomon told him, "Go home."

(e) 1 Kings 2:10-25

All would have gone well for Adonijah, except...

¹³ At this time Adonijah son of Haggith went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. "Do you come in peace?" Bathsheba asked.

"Yes. This is a peaceful visit," Adonijah answered. ¹⁴ "I have something to say to you."

"You may speak," she said.

¹⁵ "You remember that at one time the kingdom was mine," Adonijah said.

Everyone outside the family and staff assumed Adonijah would be the next king. He was the oldest.

"All the people of Israel recognized me as their king, but things have changed. Now my brother is the king, because the LORD chose him. ¹⁶ Now I have one thing to ask you; please do not refuse me."

Bathsheba answered, "What do you want?"

¹⁷ "I know King Solomon will do anything you ask him," Adonijah continued.

"Please ask him to give me Abishag the Shunammite to be my wife."

¹⁸ "Very well," she answered. "I will speak to the king for you."

Huh? Who is Abishag? We skipped over that part of the story. She was King David's last concubine... almost. She and David never had sex. But she did try to keep him warm in bed.

If Adonijah could get David's last concubine, then he would feel encouraged that he could still get David's throne. It is very unlikely that Adonijah and Abishag were really in love. Later we learn that Adonijah and Joab were still conspiring, and Solomon figured it out.

¹⁹ So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah. When Solomon saw her, he stood up to meet her, then bowed down, and sat on the throne. He told some servants to bring another throne for his mother. Then she sat down at his right side.

²⁰ Bathsheba said, "I have one small thing to ask you. Please do not refuse me."

“Ask, mother,” the king answered. “I will not refuse you.”

²¹ So she said, “Allow Abishag the Shunammite to marry your brother Adonijah.”

²² King Solomon answered his mother, “Why do you ask me to give him Abishag? Why don’t you also ask for him to become the king since he is my older brother? Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah would support him!”

Solomon gave the order to execute Adonijah (verse 25). Joab ran for cover... without success (verses 28-34).

This is the last we know about Bathsheba.

(f) Matthew 1:6

From Jesus' family tree:

⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon.

(Solomon’s mother had been Uriah’s wife.)

Lessons for us

- (1) Even secret sins have long term consequences... and our sins hurt more people than realize.
- (2) God can forgive the worst sins, and He can redeem the worst mess.