

## 10. David and Bathsheba: Adultery and After

**Biblical material:** 2 Samuel 11, 12.

### Quotes

- No adultery is bloodless. *Natalia Ginzburg*
- I've looked on many women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times. God knows I will do this and forgives me. *Jimmy Carter*
- Gambling, eating meat, wine-bibbing, adultery, hunting, thieving, debauchery - these seven things in this world lead to the hells. *Sanskrit Shloka*
- I do not think there are any men who are faithful to their wives. *Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis*

### Questions

Why is this adulterous relationship worthy of attention? How do we relate to each of the participants? Where did such passion lead? How could such things happen to someone who clearly knew God well? Why did the child pay the penalty for the sins of his parents? How does God come over in this whole story? Why do we not learn from such experiences?

### Discussion/ Comment

The simple story recorded in 2 Samuel reveals the heart of the tragedy, without much comment. The attraction is purely physical—David sees a beautiful woman bathing, and wants to sleep with her. Because he is king, he can use his power to arrange this. So it happens, and the chronicler mentions that the woman is “ceremonially clean.” To mention this in the same breath as the sin of adultery is intriguing...

Lust slaked, Bathsheba is sent home. End of relationship, such as it was. But then she discovers she is pregnant, and sends word to David. Wanting to cover up his paternity, David recalls Bathsheba's husband Uriah from the war zone. But Uriah has too much integrity to go home and enjoy his wife while his comrades are fighting. (Additionally, sexual intercourse would have meant Uriah would have become ceremonially unclean for a period, and thus unable to participate in the fighting army.). David's plan to make Uriah drunk and then have him go home to Bathsheba does not succeed either.

So David moves to plan B and arranges Uriah's death. This leaves David free to marry Bathsheba. Maybe David justified this scheme as a way of making sure Bathsheba and his child was cared for. Since Uriah was a foreigner, there would have been no kinsman to take over his line, as was required by Israelite law. David could then have stepped in and made provision for this himself, and would have appeared kind and honorable. The scheme had many benefits! But it is a horrific kind of cover-up that requires the death of an innocent man.

The prophet Nathan is sent to bring word of God's displeasure (and note how wisely Nathan does this!) The key thought is that if David wanted more, God would have given him more, so why “despise God” by this evil act? After David's confession, the prophet states that God has taken away David's sin, but because of the wider issues that God's enemies have been led by this to “utter contempt,” then the son produced by the adulterous relationship must die.

Such as judgment seems strange to us, convinced of personal responsibility. But once again, a different cultural truth prevails, seeing children (and especially sons) as a blessing from God, and a measurement of wealth and success. In the Old Testament, children are viewed very

much as “enhanced possessions,” as the story of Job makes clear. David’s son is considered an extension of David, and to “reward” the adultery through the “blessing” of a son would have led to mistaken understandings. So the child will die, says God. David understands the concepts, but still pleads for his son while he lives. Once the child dies, he accepts the divine verdict.

David ceases his pleadings for his son, and then goes to comfort Bathsheba, who was surely grieving. Solomon, a “replacement” son is the result, showing that despite the sinful start to the relationship, it is not to be broken and condemned.

Bathsheba, as Solomon’s mother, also has another “bit part” later on, after the death of David. Sadly, she does not seem to have realized the real significance of Adonijah’s request, and has to experience the rebuke of her son. (1 Kings 2:22).

Not the best of models for courtship and marriage, certainly, and it seems that Bathsheba did not really learn about scheming men. Was she as naive at the end as at the beginning...?

But what of God in all of this. As is usually the case, he is having to deal with situations a long way removed from the ideal. He has to act in ways that his people can understand—hence the death of David and Bathsheba’s son. And yet he still allows the relationship to continue, without repeated judgments against it, illustrating God’s grace and forgiveness—to the extent that Israel’s next king is Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. Solomon means restoration or peace, and to name their son in this way reveals the couple’s recognition of forgiveness and acceptance by God, despite the dreadful wrong they had committed.

The account warns us all of the dangers of feeling secure and then allowing ourselves to follow our own desires. The unhappy results of David’s foolishness is recorded for the benefit of those who read, to realize the tragic results of some moments of pleasure. God is not anti-pleasure; rather wanting us to enjoy all his good gifts in the right way, not in some furtive sneaking around that only brings trouble for all.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Skeptics have assailed Christianity and ridiculed the Bible, because David gave them occasion. They bring up to Christians the case of David—his sin in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba, his polygamy—and then assert that David is called a man after God’s own heart; and if the Bible record is correct, God justified David in his crimes.

I was shown that it was when David was pure, and walking in the counsel of God, that God called him a man after His own heart. When David departed from God, and stained his virtuous character by his crimes, he was no longer a man after God’s own heart. {TSB 94}

Bathsheba observed the customary days of mourning for her husband; and at their close “David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife.” He whose tender conscience and high sense of honor would not permit him, even when in peril of his life, to put forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, had so fallen that he could wrong and murder one of his most faithful and most valiant soldiers, and hope to enjoy undisturbed the reward of his sin. Alas! how had the fine gold become dim! how had the most fine gold changed!

From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; “but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Proverbs 14:12. Happy they who, having ventured in this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes. God in His mercy did not leave David to be lured to utter ruin by the deceitful rewards of sin. {PP 720}

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