

2 Samuel 11:1-27

David's Moral Failure : Encountering Temptation

- **James 1:12-15** - "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Joseph had fended off the sexual temptation from Potipher's wife (**Genesis 39**), showing he was loyal to God's law (and to his employer Potipher). David flips the script.

Paul warns against having too much confidence in your own strength of character.

- **1 Corinthians 10:12-14** - "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."

Elsewhere, Paul equates covetousness (*pleonexia*) with idolatry (**Colossians 3:5**). This goes all the way back to Eve's being charmed by the appearance of the forbidden fruit in the Garden. The Hebrew equivalent to "covet" is used there, as well as when Israel lusted after the rich food of Egypt and for meat instead of the manna in the wilderness.

Anything we supremely desire pushes that object of desire to take priority over God, and it becomes an idol that we are worshipping. Covetousness, which is basically selfishness, the outworking of our natural "evil inclination," is the root of all sin. It is grasping acquisition as opposed to giving in love.

The story of David and Bathsheba depicts every stage of the progression of sin. First, he is drawn away by lust, and then goes to extraordinary lengths to cover it up, even murder. He seems blind to the evil he is involved with until confronted by Nathan the prophet.

In the end David repents - showing why he could still be called a "man after God's own heart."

- **Acts 13:22-23** - "...he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus."

Repentance allows God to see His Son in us, Who indeed "fulfilled all His will."

The Dangers of Success

David by now had an unbroken string of military victories and was in the process of defeating the last of Israel's surrounding enemies, the Ammonites. But as the proverb says:

- **Proverbs 16:18** - "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

In fact, Moses had warned Israel about the dangers of spiritual complacency, that leads us to say, "My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth."

- **Deuteronomy 8:11-14** - "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage..."

Another Campaign Against Ammon

2 Samuel 11:1 - "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem."

Bathsheba

2 Samuel 11:2-4 - "And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house."

"beautiful = *tob*, good - This is the same word used to describe Eve's assessment of the forbidden fruit in the garden.

Nothing is said about Bathsheba's feelings about all this. David was king, and in that position of power, she could not really refuse without putting her family in danger. This was not what we normally consider an adulterous "affair." It was more like the "me too" movement's reports of what are really abuses of positions of power.

Apparently this was meant to be only a one-night stand, but...

2 Samuel 11:5-6 - "And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am

with child, And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David."

This was a problem. Uriah had been away fighting with the army, and could not have fathered the child. Bathsheba's pregnancy might then bring an accusation of adultery, and she (and David) could be executed by stoning according to the Law:

- **Leviticus 20:10** - "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

More Abuse of Power

Uriah is called "the Hittite" - which means he either was from a part of Israel that formerly was under Hittite control or he was a convert from among the Hittites. Or possibly that he had been noted for some valiant act in battle against the Hittites.

David tries several times to get Uriah to visit his wife, hoping that they would have sex and obscure the possibility that the pregnancy was not Uriah's child. He even got him drunk (**verse 13**).

But Uriah shows more loyalty to his fellow soldiers than David does:

2 Samuel 11:11 - "And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing."

But this was exactly what David had been doing - he had been back in the palace, eating and drinking and -furthermore - sleeping with someone else's wife.

Uriah possessed the simple zeal that David had exhibited in his youth against Goliath.

Betrayal

2 Samuel 11:15 - "And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die."

This evil "palace intrigue" was successful, and Uriah was killed in the battle. This incident exemplifies everything that is corrupt when "the way of the world" has free reign. The corruption of power, "might makes right" replaces the rule of law, self seeking overrules respect for the institution of marriage. David objectifies Bathsheba as a sex object rather seeing her as a human being, finally the taking of a human life... and the list goes on.

The reference in **verse 21** to a woman casting a millstone from a wall that killed Abimelech is from an incident in **Judges 9:52-53**.

David's continued the lie in his response to the news of Uriah's death in **11:25** - "the sword devoureth one as well as another," as if it were a random event instead of the calculated murder that it was.

2 Samuel 11:26-27 - "And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD."

Later Jewish practice was to wait 90 days after the husband's death to marry another, to guarantee that any child born would be known to belong to the new husband. Here they wait only the seven-day mourning period. (Mishna Yebamot, c. 11. sect. 6)

The fact that this incident is included in the history of David's reign argues for the inspired origin of the Bible. No other nation would allow this story to appear in a chronicle of their greatest king.

On the other hand, the Biblical account of the sin of David and Bathsheba is one of the passages that too dangerous to be read in the public readings from the Torah and the Prophets in the synagogue, nor is it targummed into the vernacular. It was only studied by rabbis with their students.

Rabbinical Hair-Splitting

But the rabbis had a problem reconciling this sin with their belief that David and Bathsheba were destined to be married and have Solomon, who was the fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy of David's line in **2 Samuel 7:12-16** - "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever."

Bathsheba had been designated as David's wife during the six days of Creation, they believed. David "enjoyed her as an unripe fruit," that is, he "married" her before the proper time, when the fruit [the fig] was still unripe. He rather should have waited until she was ready for him, after the death of Uriah.

So the Talmud (Shabbat, 55a) denies the adultery of David on the ground that every warrior had, before going to the field, to give his wife a divorce, so that Bathsheba was free retroactively upon the death of her husband in battle. (That was done to prevent a situation in which the soldier's wife would be unable to remarry because the soldier did not return from battle and there were no witnesses to his fate). David and Bathsheba's act of intercourse served also to establish their marriage.

The Talmud continues: "Anyone who says that David sinned with Bathsheba is nothing other than mistaken, as it is stated: 'And David succeeded in all his ways; and the Lord was with him' (**1 Samuel 18:14**). Is it possible that sin came to his hand and

nevertheless the Divine Presence was with him?"

Breaking down the text, they conclude that "David sought to do evil but did not actually do so. His intentions were improper; however, his actions were proper" and that's why he was chastised by Nathan.

They also cite **1 Kings 15:5** - "David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

The rabbis claim that since Bathsheba is not mentioned, that David's intercourse with her was "right." (Of course, the "matter of Uriah the Hittite" could also include the incident that led to it, including the adultery with Bathsheba).

But what about murdering Uriah?

Well, they say that Uriah was insolent to David by using the wrong form of address, and implying he was more loyal than the King. Also, he disobeyed the king's wishes by not returning home to Bathsheba. Thus David as king had the right to execute Uriah.

Nathan's accusation: "Uriah the Hittite you have smitten with the sword," they say, doesn't refer to his murder, only that David "could have judged him before the Sanhedrin as one guilty of treason against the throne, and you did not judge him in that manner. Instead, you had him executed in a manner that deviated from the generally accepted principles of judgment. With regard to that which is written: "And his wife you have taken to be your wife"; it means that you have rights of marriage with her, as by law Bathsheba was already divorced from Uriah.

But the scripture pointedly calls Uriah Bathsheba's "husband" after his death while she was mourning for him.

The rabbis searched for an explanation of how David fell into this sin in the first place.

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/bathsheba-midrash-and-aggadah>

The Midrash tells this story:

David asks God: "Why is it said [in prayer] 'the shield of Abraham,' and not 'the shield of David'?" To which God replied: "I put Abraham to ten tests, but I did not try you" (Midrash Tehillim 18:25). David said to Him: "Master of the Universe! 'Probe me, O Lord, and try me' (**Psalm 26:2**)." God responded: "I will try you, and I will grant you a boon that I did not afford them. I did not inform the Patriarchs with what I would try them, but you I tell that I will try you with a sexual matter." When David heard how he would sin, he changed his night couch to a day couch (i.e., he engaged in intercourse during the day, so that he would be sated and not have sinful thoughts about any woman). It is therefore said (**2 Samuel 11:2**): "Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch," for it was then that he arose from intercourse [with one of his wives]. The Rabbis note that

when he acted so, he forgot one fact: man has a small organ that when fed becomes hungry [and desires more], but when starved is satisfied (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 107a). His lying with his wives that day was of no avail, and so when he saw Bathsheba in the afternoon he nevertheless lusted after her.

Another midrash portrays Bathsheba as a modest woman and relates how she washed her hair under a bucket, hidden from all. David was walking about on the roof when Satan came and appeared to him as a bird. David shot an arrow at the bird, but the bird flew away, and the arrow hit the bucket and broke it. Thus Bathsheba was revealed to David as she was bathing (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 107a). See **Psalm 11:1–2** [attributed to David], that describes how the upright fall under "the arrows of the wicked."

All this rabbinical "legaleze" seems too much like the very bureaucratic manipulation and self-justification that David himself engaged in to carry out his liaison with Bathsheba and Uriah's murder.

Although David is a type of the Messiah, he wasn't the Messiah, he was merely a man.

David's sin not only blackened his own name but impugned the integrity and authority of the kingdom and of God's Law.

But God always uncovers what we're trying to hide.

- **Jeremiah 16:17** - "For My eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from My face, and their guilt is not concealed from My eyes."

- **Ecclesiastes 12:14** - "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

- **Luke 12:2-3** - "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."

In the next chapter, God sends Nathan the prophet to confront David about his sin.