

BIBLE CLASS 15.08.24 A STUDY OF BATHSHEBA

Bathsheba is of special interest because she is one of the five women named by Matthew in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, the others being Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Mary herself; and each of these women had an unusual history. Matthew records the royal line through Solomon, Bathsheba's son, and Luke gives the line of Christ through Nathan, another son of David and Bathsheba. Thus of all David's many wives, God chose Bathsheba to be the mother of both sons in the ancestry of the Messiah (Matt. 1:6; Luke 3:31; 1 Chron. 3:5). Humanly speaking we might well have considered Abigail to be the more fitting mother, but God chose otherwise.

Ancestress of the Messiah

Her name means "Daughter of the Oath". She was the daughter of Eliam, one of David's mighty men, and the grand-daughter of Ahithophel, David's powerful and influential counsellor. (2 Sam. 11:3; 1 Chron. 3:5; 2 Sam. 23:34). It was natural that Uriah, another of David's personal bodyguard, should meet and marry his comrade's very beautiful daughter. He probably had been in David's service many years and was older than his bride, whose grandfather he probably knew. Nathan's parable in which the little ewe lamb is as a daughter to the poor man also indicates the great affection Uriah had for his young wife (2 Sam. 12:1–3).

David's mighty men lived near the palace, a palace which archaeologists have shown was higher than city buildings within the city walls. Uriah's house was not far away from the Place from which David was able to observe the capital. No doubt Uriah felt his wife was quite safe living there in his absences on duty. It seems that there were no children of this marriage and Bathsheba may well have prayed earnestly, as did every faithful Jewish woman, that she would have a son and that she might be the ancestress of the Messiah.

Royal Summons

The Biblical account begins in springtime, a time of great beauty in Israel, and also the time when kings go forth to battle (2 Sam. 11:1). After wintering at home, Uriah along with the armies of the Yahweh, marched with General Joab across the Jordan to Rabbah, 50 miles away, to complete the conquest of the Ammonites. However, instead of leading his troops into battle as he usually did, this time David “tarried still at Jerusalem”. It was a fatal decision! After his mid-wrest walked up to the flat roof of the palace to enjoy the coolness of the early evening. According to rabbinical commentary it was unlawful to peer over neighbour’s premises; privacy was to be respected, so it unlikely that Bathsheba would suspect that she was being watched by the king from the palace roof. She was performing the regular ceremonial washing required of women by the Law of Moses. When the royal summons came she would probably assume that some news of Uriah had been received; perhaps some valiant act of outstanding bravery or that he had been wounded, but little was she aware of what was to follow. How devastated she must have felt when she returned home next morning. There was no one to whom she could turn for comfort or advice. What was *her* word against the king’s? Had it been any other man, she could have sought his protection and redress. As soon as it was obvious, she must have been distraught. How could she tell Uriah? How awful that the longed for child should not be her husband’s.

Her extreme anxiety left her with no choice but to communicate with the king, but the consequences could mean death! She knew penalties that the law and the scandal of her position. Was the king above the law? Would he protect her? All she could was to pray and wait.

David sent for Uriah and tried to make him visit his home in an endeavour to cover up the fatherhood of the anticipated child. But

Uriah refused to avail himself of the comforts of his own home, while his comrades were camping in fields, unknowingly frustrating David's plan. In desperation David lowered himself to arrange Uriah's death in battle, and he told Joab the chief captain what to do, telling him "the sword devours one as well as another".

Uriah's death would be a further shock to the already troubled woman. She must have wondered much at the strange coincidence and her mourning for the good and kindly man would be sincere. It would be little comfort that he would never know her shame or regret his loyalty to his beloved king. He had died loving and trusting them both; it was better thus.

Bathsheba, now a widow, had still to worry about the future and to wonder if David would concern himself at all on her behalf. The usual period of mourning was 30 days and at the end of this time she received a second summons from the king. He had not forgotten and now he offered to protect her and their child by making her his wife. Whatever her personal feelings she had no choice.

Many rulers in all ages have regarded it as their right to take any woman they wanted, just when they chose, married or otherwise, and to discard them just as quickly. It is a measure of David's higher standards that he was prepared to make Bathsheba a full wife and their children princes and heirs, although he already had several sons of lawful wives for the dynasty. It is evident that he was strongly attracted to her and that it was more than a passing passion, but this was part of the divine plan.

Nathan's Kindness—and Rebuke

Bathsheba would probably meet the prophet Nathan who came to give David advice and to discuss with him the things of God. Undoubtedly Nathan would be interested in the new young wife and possibly she was able to confide in this kind and protective man. He

evidently took her under his wing and maintained interest in her children subsequently. But how long did it take for Bathsheba to know and understand the true personality and spiritual depth of her new husband, hearing his psalms and hymns of prayer and praise and the playing of his harp. Her child, a boy who was possibly frail from birth, was born in the winter and David, ever a devoted father, accepted this child as fondly as his other children. Congratulations were offered by friends and officials at every royal birth and no doubt the prophet Nathan's good wishes and blessing were especially valued. We can imagine, then, the king's surprise when Nathan entering his presence with a stern, sad face, proceeded to tell him the story of the poor man's precious ewe lamb, slain so heartlessly and selfishly by the rich man to spare his own flock (2 Sam. 12).

David's reaction to his parable made him realise the enormity of his conduct before God. We know too how deeply he repented; but in spite of his prayers and great contrition God had decreed that this child of sin should die. What a touching picture we have of the anguished father pleading for the life of this son, and surely if in her heart the bereaved mother had any bitterness towards David, it would have vanished for his heartfelt and grievous sorrow that poured from him.

David's Affection

The details of this incident are significant, for David was made to recognise the degradation of his sin on the very day the product of it was born. The child died on the seventh day of his life, one day before he would have been circumcised, named, and brought into the covenant of Israel. David's sin was forgiven and its result blotted out; so now God was willing to recognise Bathsheba as David's wife whereas previously she was still regarded as the wife of Uriah, and was prepared to bless this union.

We read that David comforted Bathsheba; no doubt their joint sorrow would bind them more closely together. David would discuss

these events with her and help her to accept the divine will. Bathsheba remained his favourite wife until the end of his life and *four* other sons were born to them, the chief of whom was Solomon (1 Chron. 3:5). Surely David would not have retained his affection for her all those years unless she possessed mental and spiritual qualities which he respected, as well as mere physical beauty?

It is interesting to notice that one of their sons is named Nathan, like the prophet who was such a true friend to them both; it was this son who was the direct ancestor of Mary, the mother of Jesus. What a thrilling contrast to that other *nameless* birth; this was a child of promise and God took a special interest in him. Everyone could rejoice at this birth and Nathan gladly came to bring the present of a God-given name: "Jedidiah, beloved of the Lord", a derivation of David's own name. How great would be the joy of his parents; there is a hint of this in Proverbs 4:3, where Solomon says of them: "For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother."

David always refers to this son as "young and tender", and it must have been a very real source of happiness to him, amidst the increasing troubles of his reign, to have this spiritually minded boy with whom he could discuss the things of God.

Queen Mother

After David's death and when Solomon was firmly established, Bathsheba as queen mother became the first lady in the land. The bond between mother and son was close and this made her a powerful friend or foe to any seeking the king's favour. It was thus to Bathsheba that the dangerous half-brother Adonijah came with his subtle request that Abishag, David's young concubine, be given to him for a wife, asking her to speak to the king for him. We wonder what his motives were in asking for her at all when he was in such a delicate position. Were they solely political or was he completely infatuated and prepared to take all

the consequences? Bathsheba seemed to believe in his sincerity or she would not have risked asking Solomon.

We note the reverence and honour that the king bestowed on his mother as he prepared to receive her in audience, expecting to grant any request gladly. We can imagine then that Solomon's violent reaction was as great a shock to his mother as the nature of the request was to him. His vehemence was a measure of his intense anger. He had graciously spared his brother's life once and here he was yet again making an underhand and insidious attack on the throne. It was the custom for the new king to inherit all the previous king's wives and concubines; thus Abishag belonged to him. If Solomon acknowledged Adonijah's birthright by giving her to him, he was publicly admitting that his brother had a claim and was putting a powerful weapon into the hands of Adonijah's supporters. Solomon had political wisdom and powers of judgement, so he probably estimated his brother's intentions correctly, recognising in them an act of high treason. While Adonijah lived Solomon would never be secure, so he dealt with him accordingly.

A Son Prepares for Kingship

In 1 Kings 4 we are given a list of Solomon's officers and notice that many of them were David's trusted friends and sons of his friends. We read, "Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend" (v. 5). Thus we see that Nathan not only advised David and Bathsheba but provided the young prince with the companionship of his own children, one of whom became Solomon's particular friend. The prophet was a good man and knowing the nature of David's older sons, no doubt tried to help God's chosen heir, the young Solomon, to become more spiritual and godly in preparation for his kingship over God's people. These young companions, chosen so wisely by David and his faithful servants for Solomon, grew up to be loyal friends and counsellors themselves

and helped the young king to establish his reign in righteousness and peace—a foreshadowing of the Kingdom.

There is a Jewish tradition that Bathsheba was the king's mother of Proverbs chapter 31. This certainly shows that Bathsheba was a spiritually minded woman capable of excellent counsel; but this identification is most improbable, for Bathsheba would be very unlikely to refer to her marriage vows, and Solomon was not her firstborn son (v. 2). However we think we have established a case for Bathsheba's good character without recourse to this chapter. Nothing further is recorded of her, but we can assume that she lived long enough to witness the building and dedication of the beautiful temple that her husband planned and her son built. She would see Solomon in all his glory, fame, wisdom and judgement but would be mercifully spared all knowledge of his decline and idolatry.

In conclusion there are seven main points to illustrate the true character of this woman:

1. God did not condemn her, neither did Nathan or David.
2. From Nathan's parable we deduce that Uriah was devoted to her; surely the little ewe lamb was a symbol of innocence and purity.
3. David's strong and abiding affection for her during the rest of his life.
4. The prophet Nathan was a loyal friend to her and her son Solomon.
5. Solomon had a great respect for his mother.
6. Of all David's wives, God chose Bathsheba to be the mother of the good and peaceable son who was to succeed David and build God's temple. Her influence was important.
7. God chose her to be the mother of the *two* sons of David in the direct line of the Lord Jesus, and she is mentioned in Matthew's genealogy with four other women of known faith.

“Daughter of the Oath”

Through her union with David, Bathsheba became an integral part of the great and precious promises which the Lord made to David; as Peter preached: “God had sworn with an oath to him (David) that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30).

Bathsheba became indeed “Daughter of the Oath” that will be fulfilled and perfected in great David’s greater Son.

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