

13th August 2024

Bathsheba...

2 Samuel 11

This study is to look at the reactions, behaviour and circumstances of the episode relating to Bathsheba. Much study has been put into that of David, but there were two people involved.

The nation was at war, but David was by now very well known and recognisable to his enemies, and was the figurehead of the nation. It was wise therefore that he remained at the palace to manage things from a distance and let the experts manage the fighting. However, it is evident he was bored and had time on his hands. Being an armchair general was not his thing, and with not much to do, his attention wandered. Proverbs 18:9 *He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.* [better trans – brother to him that is a destroyer] David turned into a destroyer through boredom.

2 Samuel 5:9-11, 2 Samuel 16:22 and Nehemiah 12:37 show that David had his palace built in a prominent position south of what is known today as the Temple Mount, but high on the east side of the area known as Ophel. Archaeological remains of this location are



shown here. Visiting this site reveals that being on a hill, there were many living quarters and city dwellings below it.

He decided to enjoy the breeze in the spring evening, and could look down at the activity below, and the view

of the hills around. Below him he could see a beautiful lady washing herself. The verses in 2 Samuel 11:3-4 say a lot in very few words. David lusted after her, found out who she was sent for her, had sexual relations with her, and then sent her away again.

Some have suggested that it takes two to tango, and that she was obviously parading herself half naked in view of the palace knowing

David was at home, and had ensnared him, and was therefore culpable in some way. Strangely this view is in line with an old fashioned view that if a woman is taken advantage of or humiliated, in a sexual way, that it is somehow also her fault. In Islam for example, in some countries, women who are raped are punished as a matter of course. It is only in recent years that men are held accountable more for their actions. This is not to say that there do not exist some women who do behave in a licentious way, just as many men do. But this Bible class is to look at the nature of Bathsheba, that is her involvement, her decisions, her input, and her treatment.

However, the text is silent on her reaction, input and decisions – also nowhere does scripture anywhere condemn Bathsheba for her actions.

Why should she have been foolish or flaunting, just for washing herself? It was David wandering around on a roof (is that the normal place to take a walk?) not Bathsheba washing on the roof. It was David that had the facility built with such a commanding view, so he could clearly see many of his subjects below. As he watched the young lady below, he was guilty of what is called today voyeurism, by spying on those below him.

Bathsheba was not in a hot tub, or sunbathing on the side of swimming pool. Just washing. Key words are mentioned in the verses. Verse 4: *and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness*: What uncleanness? It is described in Leviticus 15:19 onwards. Under the law of Moses, the menstrual cycle of a woman rendered her unclean - for any issue from the human body ritually defiled – as nearly all which comes out of man – his words and actions spiritually defile. But also, the sacredness of blood is being taught – *the blood is the life thereof*. Thus, laws were given to teach the nation of these spiritual lessons, as well as practical aspects to a lesser degree.

Bathsheba was therefore washing as part of that cleansing process, which was why she was not washing inside the house, as anything

she touched in the process would have made it ritually unclean (as per Leviticus 15). Being 100% discreet in a city environment was not as easy as described under the law, where the law was given to those in tents, or in a rural environment. So in the city, normally in the back yard or behind the wall would have served the purpose, no one could see. In the archaeological discoveries in Jerusalem *mikvahs* – or ritual cleansing baths, indentations in the limestone, are found everywhere, and nearly always outside. So it would have been a normal arrangement, and something that regularly took place. To assume that Bathsheba was naked is also wrong, as it was not necessary for Bathsheba to disrobe, but would have had a covering around her.

It is crucial to remember that Uriah was her husband. He was a Hittite. His ancestry is never mentioned, so it can be safely assumed he was first generation convert to the Faith of Israel. His loyalty to God, the King, the army, his fellow soldiers was borne out of his faith. Who was he married to? And who would have taught him the Hebrew language, the law of Moses, the Gospel message? So can it be right to presume this same committed and loyal lady would be prancing around half naked on a rooftop? Later we see Bathsheba described as a little ewe lamb. Let us bear this in mind.

She would have carried on with her business, and on the 8th day gone to the temple to the priest to offer two young pigeons – just as thousands of other women would have done.

Meanwhile the all-powerful king, surrounded by courtiers and lackeys, who had been watching her from afar could not get her out of his mind. She was just minding her own business, but David was intruding and now was obsessed. He sent out officers to make enquiries. He did not even know who she was. There was no prior connection at all. Again, it is just ridiculous to even suggest that she was a temptress.

When David found out who she was, it should have been enough to cool his ardour. She was the daughter of one of his mighty men, why, no doubt, she was in a house near to the king's palace where the favoured would live. Eliam is referred to in 2 Samuel 23:34, was the son of Ahithophel one of David's favourite counsellors. But it made no difference to David. He simply was past caring. He did not care about this lady as a person. He had simply objectified her in his lust.

This woman was vulnerable, her husband was away fighting one of David's wars. David had a responsibility for all of God's people, his people, his subjects, the wellbeing of them all, including this lady. But David turned the responsibility, into a power, into a tool to get what he wanted. He manipulated the situation to his advantage, without any thought to the consequences.

Just as victims of sexual assault, and coercive practices rarely get justice today, so also Bathsheba had no voice. The Holy Spirit records nothing of her speaking, her protests, or queries. Instead by the simple silence it can be seen she had no power in contrast with David who had all the power. It was a classic case of a misuse of power in public office.

He didn't just send one discreet messenger, but messengers plural. It was imposing, it was intimidating. A power play.

How could she have refused the order to attend the palace? Her grandad Ahithophel worked in the palace after all. What did she have to fear? On the other hand, why did the king want to see her for? She knew that the King wrote lovely psalms, and was a faithful king to God, and that he had done many brave things. There could be only one thing that she was going to be told, and it would have filled her with dread. Her husband, the man she loved so much, was dead on the battlefield, surely that was it? Why else did the king want to see her?

But she agreed to go with the messengers, and now, finally as she had been taken through the corridors and halls, to find herself alone with this man, she discovered that there was no such message as she had assumed, instead this man had other intentions. She was trapped, alone and utterly helpless. There was no one to call out to, all servants and messengers knew better than to interfere with the king's matters and court protocol. No one would believe her anyway, her word against this man who had such a wonderful reputation and was loved by everybody. She had to comply, and be obedient.

Fast forward twenty odd years, the next time we read Bathsheba is summoned in to see the king, she has become his wife, and mother of the heir apparent. We see the relationship – not as husband and wife on equal terms, see 1 Kings 1: 16 *And Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What do you want?* She addressed him as my Lord the King, and she stated his complete power over all Israel 20: *And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.*

Additionally after speaking we read 31 *Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever.*

If Bathsheba had to behave like this – without any familiarity, or intimacy, but in deep reverence and respect after twenty years of being married to David, we can only imagine how she felt when meeting him for the first time, and discovering what he really wanted her for. She must have been absolutely terrified. How could she object or resist - there was no escape. Her family would suffer, her Grandad lose his job, it was so humiliating. This really needs to be thought through.

In effect and ultimately, because of the power differential, David committed rape. He had the control, Bathsheba did not.

A similar situation is recorded in Israel's early history where another powerful king sent and took a woman, against her will. She was

happily married to another man, but she was taken for the same purpose as a trophy, and objectivised. It was Abimelech in Genesis 20:2 who did the same to Sarah. If it was not for the intervention of God, then she also would have had question marks over her behaviour. But she like Bathsheba had absolutely no choice.

It is very telling that as soon as David's sordid intentions were fulfilled, he had no further use for her, and she was sent away. She returned unto her house.

There was no further communication from him, until she realised she was with child. She had to inform him. She sent and told him, this means via letter or a messenger. So no direct contact still from David. There is no record of David acknowledging her communication. Instead, the Spirit ensures we see his excellent communication skills operating very well in attempting to cover up his sin. A lot of messages back and forth but no record of anything to Bathsheba. How would she have felt, with the growing evidence of a baby within, and all the neighbours knowing that her husband was away fighting. Her reputation would have taken a real hit. Questions asked, as she would have endeavoured to hide away.

Bathsheba, who would have spent much time speaking to her dear husband of the hope of Israel, had now sealed his fate by informing David of her pregnancy. Poor Uriah. The next she heard would have been a few months later, that her husband had been killed in battle. We read she grieved and mourned for him. Certainly not the behaviour one would expect from someone who played around, or who was guilty of adultery behind her husband's back.

In Nathan's parable in chapter 17, he describes the relationship of David and his many wives, and the relationship between Uriah and Bathsheba. *The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.* This is

designed to make David see how precious and treasured Bathsheba was to her husband – and vice versa. Not the way the rich man treated his wives – from a distance, and using others to communicate, and ordering them about, like a rich man would his flocks and herds. In the parable it was the little ewe lamb which was slaughtered. In reality it was the warrior husband Uriah the Hittite. Uriah would have known nothing, a swift death, dying in faith and hope of the resurrection. But it was Bathsheba who died that day, inside, her heart broken. Deceived, manipulated and used, discarded. Now her Rock had been taken from her.

David did his best to make amends. Which was completely inadequate. We can never atone for our sins. His utterly abominable behaviour wrecked his own life, and created a domino effect of calamity and chaos. It showed the exceeding sinfulness of sin. This was the man described as being *after God's own heart...* In David's own words: *how are the mighty fallen...*

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David was forgiven his sin, as the full horror of his behaviour was shown to him. But not because he deserved forgiveness, but because God's grace is merciful. But the sin was not forgotten.

Bathsheba - not once is she condemned, but is chosen by God to be the bearer of the seed leading to Jesus Christ his own dear son, The Lamb of God who was also sacrificed on the altar of the lusts of sin. Bathsheba held no grudge against David, at least it is not recorded. She developed into a wise and influential woman, despite her grandfather turning into a traitor to David. She safeguarded the will of God as we can read in 1 Kings 1. We read of no word of protest or bitterness when Abishag was used as a comfort for the king in his dotage. But it would have hurt surely.

But the real comfort for Bathsheba was the faith she taught her Gentile husband. As far as God was concerned that relationship was a glory to Him, and both are famous, written in ink, in blood, and in faith in the book of life.

Matthew 1:6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon **of her that had been the wife of Urias;**

Bathsheba means *daughter of an oath*. That promise, she ensured was kept. God will keep His promise to her.

Bathsheba – a beautiful woman within. The outside is not important
- God looks on the heart.

Brother Terry