

GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BATHSHEBA

(I Samuel 11, 12)

ON A STREET IN JERUSALEM in the vicinity of the palace built for King David lived Captain Uriah and his beautiful wife Bathsheba. Uriah was among the top thirty-seven mighty men who had proved their loyalty to David in the days of his adversity.

Bathsheba was a granddaughter of Ahithophel, one of the king's valued counselors. Perhaps Ahithophel's son, Eliam, who was Uriah's fellow officer, introduced his daughter to the young commander. Their marriage seemed to be one of tender devotion to each other as Nathan's parable would imply. As spring arrived, it being "**the time when kings go out to battle**," Uriah left home for the front where Joab and all the children of Israel were fighting against Ammon and were laying siege to Rabbah.

Usually David led the army, and his very presence inspired his men with courage. But he had come to middle life, perhaps he was over fifty years of age. He was very prosperous, settled comfortably, and thought it was time to retire and take things easy. His life had been strenuous. Since he had capable and proved men in the field, he decided to relax. But Satan still finds some mischief for idle men to do. Busy men have less time for the evils that come with indulgence. Dr. Whyte says that the years between forty and fifty are morally the most dangerous in one's life.

In David's tried and busy youth he was eager to avoid displeasing the Lord or proving unworthy of His high calling. Now he felt as if he had succeeded, which is a most precarious moment for any of us. The apostle Paul was not of the number who thought he had arrived at life's purpose, for he said: "**Not as though I had already attained, either were I already perfect . . . but I press [stretch myself] toward the mark**" (Philippians 3:12- 14).

None of us is conscious of the latent seeds of evil which lie within one's heart. It takes unexpected circumstances to reveal the growth of tendencies which we thought ourselves incapable of harboring.

David had great musical ability, wealth, and a kingdom. He was famous for his courage and his rare ability to act wisely in difficult circumstances. Self-denial had strengthened his character in many ways. Sorry to say he had multiplied wives and now had more time to indulge in pleasures than 1 before.

After an early evening nap he went to the roof of his palace which overlooked all the city and saw beautiful Bathsheba washing herself on her roof. One often deplores the lack of modesty in self-exposure at our seashores which offer similar temptations today.

David had failed to make a covenant with his eyes. Though a mature man, his passions were aroused, and he inquired who the pretty girl was and sent for her. Perhaps she thought he had some special news of her young husband's exploits in battle and wished to honor her for his sake. She may never have suspected his motives. He couldn't mean anything wrong, he was a good churchman, an honorable man. Good King David was old enough to be her father. Young girls should be warned against the flatteries and attentions of older men. They, too, often take advantages that would never be tolerated from younger men. Girls are sometimes trustful and off their guard because of their respect for age. To her embarrassment she found herself being fondled by her host. Oh, that she had fled the palace!

Matthew 5:27-30 is very pointed and important in warning against any infidelity to our marriage relations. The Lord warns against even looking in the direction of temptation; it would pay to tear out your eye and cast it away rather than follow its lust. Proverbs 6:29 warns against touching your neighbor's wife. The Lord says that you should cut off your hand, even your right hand, rather than let it lead you into temptation and the destruction of the flesh. **"Whoso committeth adultery lacketh understanding; he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away"** (Proverbs 6:32, 33). Therefore we need to **"gird up the loins of our minds"** (I Peter 1:13), and not let our thoughts run riot, but bring sinful suggestions into subjection.

How many dreadful blots have resulted from that which at first seemed thoughtless familiarity! We are not to allow even the little intimacies of Christian love ripen into unhallowed freedom and consequent evils.

Paul writes to the Thessalonian saints to order their lives, to please God and maintain scrupulously purity of life, honoring the sanctity of marriage that there be no license. He plainly asserts God will avenge unchastity. He has called us to holiness in spirit, soul, and body. He calls on us to mortify unholy desires, reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto righteousness. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we must not grieve Him.

Bathsheba returned to her home maybe a trifle flattered by the royal notice, yet greatly humiliated by the betrayal of her husband's confidence and love. She was terrified at the discovery of the results of her sin. She sent word to David that something must be done. He too was concerned lest his "shame and reproach" be exposed. At last David decided to send for Uriah to come home under pretense of wanting a report on the progress of the battle. But his homecoming was in reality to make it appear that he was the father of Bathsheba's unborn child. David sounded as if he were greatly concerned about Uriah's comfort, but there was no confession of his wickedness to him. He asked for Joab, the army, and the details of the battle.

He then suggested that he take a few days' leave and go home to his wife.

I don't think it was a long interview. There was a consultation with the cook to find out his favorite dishes, and orders were given to send over the best dinner he could provide to the home of Uriah as a surprise for him.

The dinner arrived with the king's compliments, but Uriah was not there. I wonder if it was an untouched meal. Poor Bathsheba! She must have looked and longed for her husband and at the same time dreaded meeting him. She would know he was in town from the messengers who brought the dinner. What tormenting by her conscience she must have suffered as hour after hour passed without a word from him! Did it not add to her agony that the punishment for her sin was stoning? Her torment was aggravated by the thought that perhaps Uriah had learned the truth. The next day came but no Uriah!

Next morning David learned that Uriah did not go home but slept in the guardhouse with the other soldiers. He demanded an explanation for disobeying orders. Each word of Uriah's reply must have cut the king to the heart as he declared his loyalty to God first, then to Israel, and to his general. He was always conscious of fighting the Lord's battles and upholding the honor of his nation. He was ready to endure hardness as a good soldier of the Lord. This must have been a rebuke to the king for his self-indulgence while his army was attacking the enemy.

David was desperate—kindness did not accomplish what he wanted. He decided to entertain Uriah and make him drunk. All too soon David felt the force of the warning that God would judge the man who put a stone of stumbling in another's way. But again David's scheme did not work. Uriah did not forget his vow. That day must have been endless to Bathsheba. And it came to pass in the morning after a hectic night that the king wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah, saying under his breath, "Dead men tell no tales." He wrote the order for the death of Uriah, his innocent, loyal servant.

I suppose Uriah carried it in his bosom, well pleased to carry a message from his monarch to the general. It read: **"Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die"** (11:15). Joab must have raised his eyebrows. He did not ask Uriah any questions. The king's word was law.

Joab assigned him to the most dangerous spot, and he died among others. Joab dispatched a messenger to report on the battle, and added as a postscript, **"Uriah . . . is dead also."** David sent back word: **"Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make the battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him"** (11:25).

Yes, men's swords fall on one as well as another. But David learned God's sword of judgment falls on the offender's head. Sin hardens a man. David thought the matter closed. Yet God's holiness must be maintained by great or small; His name and truth must be vindicated and David publicly scourged. **"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good"** (Proverbs 15:3).

"And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband" (11:26).

Those were dark days for her. “Oh, if I only hadn’t!” would be the dirge ringing in her ears. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife and bare him a son. Perhaps David would be admired for taking one of the war widows under his protection. She was expecting a baby and now she was assured provision for life. But God sees behind all “the front” we may erect to deceive, and we read: **“But the thing that David had done displeased [or was wicked in the eyes of] the Lord.”**

God waited almost a year for David to come to his senses and to return in contrition. Did his willful, unlawful indulgence bring him joy? He tells us in Psalm 32:3, 4 what a wretched time it was: **“When I kept silence”** (refusing to confess and be restored) **“my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long”** (he felt like a miserable, afflicted, old man) **“for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.”** Inwardly, he was in a fever, dried out. He may have carelessly gone through the motions of religious services in the tabernacle, but he had lost his song; he had no desire to play the harp those days. He wasn’t anxious to see the preacher. But God was very much concerned for the man He had chosen.

“And the Lord sent Nathan to David” (12:1). How good of God to send a man in whom David had confidence, and whose love and interest he did not question! It takes a brave man to reprove a powerful king. John the Baptist paid for it with his head. Nathan must have prayed much for wisdom and tact in his approach to his sovereign. He used a parable, a common method in the East, of the rich man with flocks and herds who took the one tender ewe lamb from his neighbor’s bosom to make a feast for a traveling visitor. David became incensed by such injustice and passed judgment with an oath, declaring that the man should restore fourfold, and because he had no pity **“the man that hath done this thing shall surely die”** (12:5, 6). Then said Nathan unto him, **“Thou art the man”** (12:7).

David stood convicted. He saw himself as God saw him. He had pronounced with an oath his own sentence. He was silent in a new way—not stubbornly silent as in Psalm 32—but speechless with guilt.

Then Nathan told him what a disappointment he was to the Lord. After all His mercies and plans for him, he enumerated God’s charges against him. The Lord had made him king, he had been blessed with a family and God was ready to pour out more mercies, but:

1. **“Thou hast despised the commandment of the Lord.”**
2. **“Thou hast done evil in his sight”** (God saw all you did.)
3. **“Thou hast killed Uriah with the sword.”** (You pretended others did. It was your hand, David.)
4. **“Thou hast despised me.”**
5. **“Thou hast taken the wife of Uriah to be thy wife.”**
6. **“Thou didst it secretly.”**
7. **“Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house.”** One does not use the sword with impunity. They that take the sword shall perish by the sword.
8. **“Evil shall arise against thee out of thine own house.”**

9. **“You will reap what you sowed.”**

10. **“Your punishment will be manifest to all.”**

And David said, **“I have sinned against the Lord.”** As Nathan said: **“The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die; howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.”** David learned that God’s throne was not only a throne of grace, but also a throne of judgment. Chastening is needed because we are His children, and for a witness to the world that He is, **“faithful and just to forgive.”**

As he looked around on his family, did he wonder which of them should draw the sword against him? The fourfold judgment he had pronounced was surely reaped in his own family—in the child, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. He sowed the wind in breaking the sanctity of marriage, and through his children he reaped the whirlwind.

And Nathan departed to his home. And the Lord struck the child of Uriah’s wife (God never forgot she belonged to Uriah), and it was very sick. We do not read of any resentment toward God’s messenger Nathan. It would seem that the Lord struck the child immediately. David besought the Lord for the child, but his fastings, prayers, and prostration did not change God’s sentence because he had made the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The world must know that God will not tolerate evil in His children. When David knew the child was dead, he arose, washed, and anointed himself, changed his clothes, and came into the house of the Lord and worshiped.

In David’s heart there was no questioning of the Rightness of God’s ways—there was quiet submission. Not only that, but he witnessed to his astonished servants that his confidence was in the hope of resurrection and reunion with his loved one after death. He said of the dead child, **“I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”** David poured out his heart to the Lord in that wonderful Fifty-first Psalm that many have been glad to use to express so well the cry of their contrite hearts:

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to thy lovingkindness:
Blot out my iniquity,
Cleanse me from my sin,
I acknowledge my transgressions,
My sin is ever before me,
Against thee have I sinned;
Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean,
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
That the bones that thou hast broken may rejoice.
Hide thy face from my sins,
Blot out all mine iniquities,
Create in me a clean heart, O God;
Renew a right spirit within me,

Cast me not away from thy presence,
Take not thy Holy Spirit from me,
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, Uphold me,
Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;
And sinners shall be converted unto thee.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou shalt not despise.

What other monarch ever wrote his own penitential prayer for all generations to read that they might be converted and turn to God who is “**ready to forgive**”? I wonder if David composed the music for this psalm, and if he sang it with tear-stained face to the accompaniment of the harp.

Bathsheba’s subsequent history is rather touching, as if God would make up to her for her suffering. And David comforted Bathsheba, and she bare a son and he called his name Solomon which means peaceable. When we are right with God, what peace it brings to the heart! He and Bathsheba sent for Nathan, the man who had reproved David and was the means under God of his restoration to the Lord. Nathan named him “**Jedidiah**” meaning “*Beloved of the Lord.*” “**And the Lord loved him**” (12:24).

Later three other children were born, Shammur, Shobab, and Nathan. They called one of these after their dear friend and spiritual counselor, the prophet Nathan. The over-abounding grace of God was exemplified when He restored and again used His servant as He did Peter. From Bathsheba’s children, Solomon and Nathan, we have the direct lineage of our Lord. Joseph, the foster father of the Lord Jesus, came through Solomon, and Mary’s lineage was traced through Nathan, both children of David and Bathsheba.

In David’s last illness, Adonijah plotted to seize the throne of his father, but Nathan, hearing of this unexpected strategy, hastened to Bathsheba, advising her to use her influence immediately with the sick king, reminding him of his promise to make Solomon his successor. Nathan assured her he would come in right after her and confirm her word. David demanded that Solomon be called and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet officiated at the coronation, and all the people shouted “**God save king Solomon.**”

Others too recognized the influence of the queen mother on Solomon. He rose to meet her and bowed himself to her, seating himself on his throne he caused a seat to be set for his mother, and she sat at his right hand while he patiently heard her request, though he acted according to justice. It was a concern of Bathsheba’s that Solomon should be a worthy king, and I doubt not he owed much to her early training. In her matchless ode to him she warned him that women and wine unfitted him as a judge of the poor and oppressed, then advised him what were the qualifications of a good wife, the virtuous God-fearing woman.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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