

Although David had been characterized by the LORD as being “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), he still fell prey to the same weaknesses that have ensnared men throughout history. David’s lust led him to commit adultery with the wife of another man. The desire to hide this sin led David down a dark path that resulted in the even greater sin of orchestrating the death of an innocent man.

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.

“And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle” – Wars were not typically fought in the winter due to the hardships of dealing with the cold weather. The Jewish new year corresponded to March on our calendar, so the writer here is referring to the time after the end of the Jewish year when springtime had come. Kings typically chose to begin their military campaigns at this time of year when the weather was warmer and more favorable.

“that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah” – David sent Joab and his army to continue the hostilities began the previous year (2 Sam. 10).

“But David tarried still at Jerusalem” – As king, it was David’s responsibility to wage war against Israel’s enemies, but like the previous year, he sent Joab to conduct the military campaign instead of going himself (2 Sam. 10:7).

2 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 it came to pass in an eveningtide [night; sunset], that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house” – In that day people often slept in the open air of their rooftops during warmer weather since they did not have air conditioning. The Hebrew word for “eveningtide” indicates that the sun was either setting or had already set and David was getting up from the bed. Either he was already lounging on his bed or perhaps he wasn’t able to sleep. He began to walk idly around his roof.

“and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself” – Apparently David’s house was taller than the surrounding houses (some commentators suggest that it was on a hill) and so from his roof he was able to look into the courtyard of nearby houses. He happened to see a woman bathing, perhaps for ceremonial reasons because of her menstrual period (v. 4). Commentators debate on how much of the fault lay with this woman for what happens next, although the text here seems to place all the blame and responsibility on David. The woman may have believed that she was bathing in private after dark and was likely behind a courtyard wall. David’s vantage point allowed him to see her, although he may have only been able to see her by torch-light or by the light of the setting sun.

“and the woman was very beautiful [good; pleasant; agreeable] to look upon” – The Hebrew word for “beautiful” means that she was pleasant to look at, similar to our English expression “good looking.” However, the text includes the word “very,” indicating that she was not only pleasant to look at but that she was very pleasant to look at. David becomes immediately mesmerized by her beauty.

3 And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

“And David sent and enquired after the woman” – David is now following his flesh. He liked what he saw and wants to see more and so he asks his servants about the identity of this woman.

“And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam” – Eliam is listed among David’s “mighty men” (2 Sam. 23:34) and the son of Ahithophel, who was one of David’s advisors. The fact that Ahithophel later sided with Absalom against David may have been motivated by what David is about to do with his granddaughter and the subsequent death of her husband.

“the wife of Uriah the Hittite” – Uriah was also listed among David’s mighty men (2 Sam. 23:39) and was apparently loyal to David and Israel despite being a Hittite.

4 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.

“And David sent messengers, and took her” – David sent his men to escort Bathsheba to his house. It’s unclear if this was a mere invitation that she was free to decline or if David used his position as king to make it difficult for her to refuse. If Bathsheba resisted, it is not recorded here. However, the writer seems to place the responsibility for all that happens on David alone.

“and she came in unto him, and he lay with her” – When Bathsheba arrives, David takes her to his bedroom and has sexual intercourse with her.

“for she was purified from her uncleanness” – The uncleanness in question is Bathsheba’s menstrual uncleanness, which was apparently the reason she was bathing herself when David saw her. She had completed the required ceremonial cleansing described in Lev. 15:19-30, allowing David to lay with her without becoming unclean himself. The fact that she was menstruating indicates that she was ready for conception, which becomes the inevitable result of David’s evening of passion.

“and she returned unto her house” – After satisfying his lust, David allows Bathsheba to return home as if nothing had happened.

5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

It's unclear how much time had passed before Bathsheba realizes that she is now pregnant, but it appears that David and Bathsheba had only the one sexual encounter during that time. What would normally be joyous news for a husband and wife was in fact terrible news for those who have engaged in an adulterous affair. The Law of Moses declared the penalty of this sin to be death, putting both David and Bathsheba in a predicament. She could not hide the fact that she was pregnant and if she was accused of adultery, she would likely name David as the baby's father since she would not be willing to bear the penalty alone. She sends word to David so that he would be aware of the problem that he has caused for them.

Lev. 20:10 *“And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”*

Deut. 22:22 *“If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.”*

Verses 6-13: David immediately begins trying to cover up the real reason for Bathsheba's pregnancy by sending for Uriah, who was on the front lines with the rest of the army of Israel. David hoped that since Uriah was so near his house that he would use the opportunity to go home and sleep with his wife and then Bathsheba could claim that Uriah was the father. However, the man's loyalty worked against David because Uriah didn't believe it was right for him to take advantage of the convenience of being near home while the rest his comrades were away fighting a war. David even attempted to get Uriah drunk in the hopes that his reduced inhibitions would cause him to go home and sleep with his wife. When these attempts to cover his sin failed, David saw that nothing was going to prevent Uriah from eventually discovering his wife's illegitimate pregnancy and making a formal accusation of adultery against her and David.

14 And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

“And it came to pass in the morning” – This would be the morning after David's failed attempt cover up his sin by getting Uriah drunk enough to go home and sleep with his wife. David may have lain awake overnight contemplating how to solve his problem with Uriah.

“that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah” – David concluded that the only solution to his problem was the death of Uriah. He conceived a plan to accomplish this and sent the instructions to Joab. Ironically, Uriah personally and unwittingly carried these instructions for his death back to Joab.

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.

David's instructions are for Joab to assign Uriah to the most dangerous area of battle and then abandon him so that the enemy could kill him. Apparently David considered Uriah's death to not be a murder if it was the enemy that had killed him. In fact, this was how David justified Uriah's death to Joab, saying that it was the nature of war for people to die and that there was no way to predict who would live and who would die during a battle (v. 25).

Verses 16-27: Joab follows David's instructions and sends Uriah to lead an attack against the part of the city where he knew Uriah would meet the strongest resistance. The result was the death of Uriah and several other Israelite soldiers. Joab then sent a messenger back to David with a report on how the war was progressing. Knowing that David would become angry for the tactical error of attacking the strongest part of the city, Joab instructed the messenger to add the remark that Uriah had also died. Thus David would understand that the foolhardy attack was in obedience to David's instructions. David responded with the message that Joab should not be concerned about what had happened since anyone can die during a battle and that he should continue the siege against Rabbah (v. 1) until he took the city (v. 25). Meanwhile, Bathsheba began mourning over the death of her husband and when her days of mourning were over, David took her as his own wife. The chapter then ends with the ominous statement: *“But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD”* (v. 27). David believed that he had successfully hidden his sin but the LORD Who sees everything will hold David accountable for what he had done.