

The Bathsheba Episode – The Beginning of the End of David’s Kingdom

I. Introduction

1. The Scriptures indicate that David and his reign were a critical milestone in the developing salvation history.
 - a. He epitomized human kingship as administering God’s reign in His name and with His mind (1 Sam. 13:14), so that human rule is a mediatorial – i.e., *priestly* – function.
 - b. David was Yahweh’s preeminent regal and priestly *son*, and so the epitomizing Israelite (Exo. 19:1-6). Thus David was also the epitomizing *human* as depicted in Genesis 1-2.
2. David brought the Israelite kingdom – the kingdom promised to Abraham – to its fullness, securing its full extent and establishing Yahweh’s chosen place of enthronement.
3. So Yahweh pledged to David by covenant the everlasting continuance of his regal house, throne, and kingdom, to be established in a son from his line of descent.
4. All of this is the context for the Bathsheba episode, and it illumines the significance of David’s failure and God’s response to it. *David, the man after God’s own heart, showed that he, too, was ultimately subject to the procedure of the king; for all his triumphs, devotion, and faithfulness, he would fail his calling as Yahweh’s regal and priestly image-son.*

II. The Bathsheba Episode (2 Samuel 11-12)

A. Overview (11:1-27)

1. This episode occurred as David was taking his ease in Jerusalem while his army was in the field fighting the Ammonites (11:1-2). Thus the circumstance that enabled David’s sin was itself a manifestation of his ruling according to the procedure of the king (1 Sam. 8:11-12). *The Bathsheba episode only further exposed this fundamental failure in his kingship.*
2. While lounging on the roof of his palace, David spotted Bathsheba bathing and sent a servant to find out who she was. Even after learning that she was married, he sent men to bring her to him and he used his authority as king to violate and defile her. * 11:4
3. When David learned that Bathsheba had become pregnant, he sent a message to his commander Joab to send her husband Uriah – *who was away fighting for him in the war against the Ammonites* – back to him in Jerusalem under the pretence of seeking an update on the state of the conflict. * 11:6-13
 - a. David thus expanded his corruption of his regal power to now include deception and conspiracy. *His intent was to give Uriah time with his wife so that he’d be deceived into thinking that her child was his own.*
 - b. But in sharp contradiction of David and his self-serving concerns, *Uriah refused to take leave with Bathsheba out of utter devotion to his king, his comrades in arms, and the cause of Yahweh’s kingdom.* Even though confronted with such devotion, David remained undeterred in his agenda and sought to prevail with Uriah by getting him drunk.

4. When he saw his plan wasn't going to succeed, David realized that the only solution to his predicament was *Uriah's death*. If that happened right away, he could take Bathsheba as his wife and claim her child as his. If not, he could point to Uriah as the father and show himself virtuous for having taken on the care of this widow and her unborn child. Either way, David would preserve his standing before His subjects; hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. So he sent Uriah back to Joab carrying instructions for his own execution.

*Conscripting his commander and his army into his murderous conspiracy, David instructed Joab to see that Uriah was killed in battle. He had used his regal authority to exploit and abuse his household servants, Bathsheba, and Uriah, and now he was doing the same to his devoted nephew and the loyal men under his command. *11:14-25*

B. The Significance of David's Sin

1. Yahweh had warned Israel of the way a human king would exercise his rule over them (the procedure of the king), and David had shown himself to be no exception. He failed his anointing and kingship as Saul had before him, but his failure was more grievous. For, unlike Saul, David was Yahweh's uniquely chosen son-king, set apart as a man after His own heart, and he had received Yahweh's unique care and provision and His covenant promises.
2. Yahweh had chosen David and distinguished him as the preeminent example of the human regal and priestly rule He intended for His kingdom. But his failure to be such a king showed that the Lord's designs awaited another man – another who would succeed where David had failed. *Given God's covenant with him, this expectation pointed to the son promised to him.*

C. Yahweh's Judgment of David's Sin (12:1-14)

This episode is often treated as a moral lesson, *but its true meaning and importance are found in its relation to the developing biblical storyline. This is evident in the way the Lord confronted David through the mouth of His prophet.*

1. Israel's calling as the Abrahamic people was to mediate Yahweh's blessing to the nations. *The Gentiles would come to know the true and living God by observing God's faithful "son."*
2. And what was true of Israel as Yahweh's covenant son was preeminently true of Israel's king; David was uniquely the Lord's regal and priestly son, and so had a distinct obligation to Israel's mission of witness and blessing.
3. Thus the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin of taking another man's wife, but even more, with the fact that he had given the nations reason to blaspheme Israel's God.

David was guilty of abuse of power, adultery, deceit, conspiracy and murder, but as symptoms of his greater offense, namely his failure to fulfill his kingship as Yahweh's image-son, and so also his obligation to mediate Yahweh's blessing through faithful sonship.

Even as Israel's historical failure indicated that God's fulfillment of His oath to Abraham necessitated a new Israel, David's failure showed that it further demanded a new king.

4. David's failure occurred in the context of Yahweh's covenant with him, suggesting that it would have grave implications for the continuance of his house and kingdom. *The Lord imposed two penalties on David that showed this to be the case:*

- a. First, He was going to take the life of the child born to Bathsheba. * 12:13-14
- b. But beyond that, He decreed division, death, and desolation for David's house – both his immediate household and the “house” that was his dynasty and kingdom. *Yahweh was bringing a sword against David's house that would not depart until all was hacked to pieces; indeed, David himself would feel its sharp edge.* * 2 Sam. 13-19; also 2 Chron.

In the near term, David's family was to be torn apart, with his own son leading a coup that would drive David from Jerusalem and his throne. But the greatest manifestation of Yahweh's “sword” would be the rending of David's kingdom, first by being divided into two kingdoms, and ultimately by the complete destruction of both houses of Israel.

Conclusions:

1. God's judgment against David for the Bathsheba episode provided the first explicit indication that David's throne and kingdom were destined to perish. *The Lord had covenanted with David to build a house for him; now He was pronouncing His determination to tear it down. Both revelations came through the same man, binding them together in sharp antithesis.*
 - a. The implication was clear: *Yahweh's covenant promises to David would not be fulfilled in connection with his present dynasty and dominion.*
 - b. This reality, then, pointed to another critical truth: *Either Yahweh had now renounced His covenant with David, or He would fulfill His promises through some process of restoring David's desolated house and kingdom. History, and the Lord's word through His prophets, would soon reveal that the latter was the case. Yahweh would indeed uphold His faithful mercies to David, underscored at the outset by His healing and blessing of David's union with Bathsheba such that she gave birth to the covenant son.*
2. The Lord's faithfulness to His covenant with David was all the more crucial given that the covenant built on the foundation of His previous covenant with Abraham.
 - a. Israel was the Abrahamic “seed” – the regal and priestly son – ordained by Yahweh to bless the nations, and David was the focal point of that identity and vocation.
 - b. Failing to establish David's house, throne and kingdom would mean failing to secure the kingdom and regal family pledged to Abraham, *and that would mean the failure of the Lord's foreordained designs for restoring His cursed creation.*
3. From this point forward and for the next 400 years, the children of Israel would watch the Lord's sword progressively cut David's house and kingdom to pieces until there was nothing left. And through all of that destruction, and across the subsequent centuries of devastation, exile and foreign domination – indeed, right up until the day of Messiah's birth, Abraham's descendents in every generation were confronted with the same challenge of faith: *Would they yield their faith to their woeful and seemingly hopeless circumstance and what it suggested about their God, or would they believe **Him** and hold fast to His promises?*

One day the faithful in Israel would see their faith rewarded; in that day Yahweh would visit them and accomplish Israel's redemption – the new exodus they had awaited for so long – by raising up a horn of deliverance in the house of David, thus showing mercy toward the fathers by remembering His holy covenant, the oath He swore to Abraham. * Luke 1:67-79