

The Story of Bathsheba

Note: *This is a difficult story to read as it touches on power and sex as well as the tragic death of a child. As #MeToo has shown issues raised in this story are very present in our society today. There will be difficult questions asked – such as could she have done more? This is in no way to imply that Bathsheba is anything other than a victim, yet we must ask it to properly understand the reality of powerlessness before those in authority, both then and now. So please do read all the questions as neutral and not implying anything. If any of the issues raised by this story are of particular concern to you, please do speak to Nathan or Dominic if that would be of help.*

Start by reading 2 Samuel chapter 11 verses 1 to 5.

A little bit of background: Bathsheba is the granddaughter of Ahithophel – he is one of David's closest advisors (2 Samuel 16:23) and was with David for many of his mightiest exploits. Uriah, despite being labelled a Hittite is a man committed to God's law (as we will find out) whose name means Yahweh is my light. He certainly lives up to this. Uriah was one of David's closest fighting men, and part of his personal unit (2 Sam 23: 24 – 39).

The first few verses are really stark. David sees, he summons, he has sex, he sends her home. Bathsheba speaks not a word. What do you think the author is trying to convey when he tells the story in this way? Is silence acquiescence?

How would you respond to those who say Bathsheba was trying to entice the king? Should she have refused to go to the palace when summoned? What does verse 4 tell us about Bathsheba's approach to honouring God, and why it helps us get the right opinion of her?

Why did David think that he would be able to get away with what he did with Bathsheba?

What we read here is so out of character from what is written about David up until this point. What does this tell us about David? How does it help us think about ourselves?

Reflection: Woody Allen once said "I can resist everything except temptation." As part of the Lord's Prayer we say "Lead us not into temptation." Do you think God tempts us? Have a look at James 1: 13 – 15 and 1 Corinthians 10:13. What do these verses tell us about temptation?

David could have made different choices. Look at Job 31:1. What could David have done differently if he had taken these verses to heart?

What important lessons do we need to learn about seeing? How might we help those who struggle with issues such as pornography? Particularly thinking about our young people, how would we respond to those who say that looking is harmless (as long as no-one is being hurt or coerced)?

Go on to read the rest of Chapter 11.

When summoned, why did Uriah decide not to go home? What do you think of his reasoning?

What do you think was the emotional impact on Bathsheba would have been? Should Uriah have given this aspect more thought? Should it have changed his decision?

Should Bathsheba have tried to entice Uriah back home? What might be reasons to do so. What might be the reasons for not doing so? What would the consequences have been for Bathsheba had Uriah discovered she was pregnant?

David clearly has to take the blame for Uriah's death. Do others though share some of the blame with him?

Reflection: David seems to think that he can cover his wrongdoing. Are we tempted to fall into the same trap? How good are we at owning up and making amends for the things that we have done wrong?

Bathsheba is in a no-win situation. She is the victim here. When faced with really difficult choices it is sometimes easier just to do nothing. Let things play out. Yet others say that not doing anything is to shy away from doing good. Should we always attempt to do good, even if it might be costly?

Read 1 Samuel chapter 12.

What are the consequences of David's actions? (Look also at 2 Sam 15:12 and 2 Sam 16:15 for the role of Ahithophel (Bathsheba's grandfather) in what happens to David).

Does God's judgement on David seem proportionate and fair? Why/why not?

Why can't David atone for his wrongdoings?

How fair is it to Bathsheba that their child dies?

Why does David's behaviour reflect badly on God (verse 13)?

Reflection: Many of us find stories of God's wrath or anger difficult to read or understand. Look at Psalm 103 verses 8 to 14 and also at Romans 8 verses 1 & 2. How do we hold together God's mercy and God's wrath? What do you think you must deserve, and why?

What encouragement does Nathan bring to Bathsheba? Look at 1 Kings 1: 11 – 14 to see how this continues.

Reflection: Why do you think it is important that a victim is in Jesus' genealogy?