

2ND SAMUEL

Week 16, chapter 11

Last week we read 2nd Samuel chapter 11 (the story of David and Bathsheba) and set the context and background for understanding it. But we also took a little time to discuss the rather lack-of-in-depth approach that Christianity usually has taken to explain this important narrative; and we also discussed the general view of Judaism that allegorizes this story to a point that makes its important purpose practically unrecognizable. So critical is what is contained in the story of David and Bathsheba that we won't even finish this chapter today.

Let me begin by saying something that is sure to get me in trouble with the modern mainstream of Christianity as well as with Orthodox Judaism: allegory should hold nothing but the most minimal possible place in Biblical teaching or in forming our theology. Allegory ought to be reserved for illustration (perhaps) but not for seeking Biblical truth and principles, study, or establishing doctrine. Recall that the definition of allegory is that a Scripture passage means something different than what it actually says. That the author's intent is not the words he wrote but something else entirely. Thus although a verse says "up", it means "down". Although it says "yes", it means "no". Although it says "evil" it means "good". Although it says "did NOT abolish", it means "DID abolish", and so on. Unfortunately allegory is used by the Church and the Synagogue as perhaps the primary tool to examine Holy Scripture and when delivering sermons and most often the reason is as a means to validate manmade principles and traditions and to uphold their own social agendas as God ordained. In other words, religious authorities and councils develop faith doctrines and principles and then read them back into the meaning of the Bible. Thus by using allegory a Biblical passage can be rearranged and restated to mean anything that upholds a particular viewpoint or tenet of systematic theology. There is no better example of this for Jew or gentile than the story of David and Bathsheba.

For the Christian it is typically related as an exciting and comforting children's tale of the love of a handsome and powerful man for a stunningly beautiful woman, and of confession and repentance for terrible wrong doing, responded to with unlimited and unconditional forgiveness by the God of Israel. For the Jew it is a story of great merit for David (that further elevates his status and perfection before the Lord), of great treachery by Uriyah (Bathsheba's husband) and of the justice he received by means of his demise, and of the playing out of God's will from a determination that David and Bathsheba would be married and produce Solomon (a

decision God had made before the world was created).

Thus with these two foundational doctrines in mind, the gentile Christian translation scholars have played fast and loose with some of the original Hebrew words to achieve their goal, and Bible teachers and pastors have tended to gloss over David's sins and God's curse upon him in favor of focusing solely on David's repentance and the Father's mercy to harmonize their doctrine with Biblical writings. Hebrew scholars (in order to maintain their immutable stance that David was near perfect and Messiah-like in every way) turn every divine condemnation against David into praise for him, and dismiss every God-directed consequence of David's sin as theoretical but never actually being inflicted upon him.

Oh, there are God-principles contained in this chapter (and the next) that indeed are breathtaking and can cause even as unemotional a person as myself to choke up in tears, and thus we are going to painstakingly go over these passages. So stay alert; I think you'll perhaps view this episode a little differently by the time we conclude if you pay close attention. Let's re-read this pivotal chapter.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 11 all

The first words of chapter 11 are, "In the spring when kings go out to war". First of all the words, "in the spring" have been added by translators; nowhere do they actually exist in the original language. Rather springtime is presupposed because we know from voluminous historical records that the customary time when kings lead their militaries into sieges or long term battles is the spring. But we must also recall that this story that begins with Joab taking the Israelite army to lay siege to Rabbah actually is a continuation of what began in chapter 10.

(2Sa 10:13-14 CJB)

¹³ So Yo'av and the people with him went to battle Aram, and they fled before him.

¹⁴ When the people of 'Amon saw that Aram had fled, they likewise fled before Avishai and retreated into the city. Yo'av returned from the people of 'Amon and went to Yerushalayim.

So when the Syrians (the Arameans) led by **Hadad-Ezer** fled, and then the Ammonites retreated into their fortified capital city of Rabbah, **Yo'av** took his army and returned to Yerushalayim. The reason for Joab packing up and going home is that in order to take Rabbah a siege of the city would have to be employed. A siege is basically a long-term blockade; in other words troops surround the walled city where the residents and the military have barricaded themselves inside. No one is allowed to get in or out. The surrounding army at times pounds away at the fortifications or the city gate, but most often a siege amounts to merely waiting for the city's food supply (and often water supply) to run out. Then the city's army either surrenders or continues to fight in an ever-weakening condition due to disease and malnutrition. The result is inevitable unless the city is able to hold out until the weather once again turns bad (and so the attacking army leaves), or unless an ally attacks the surrounding army and rescues the city residents.

Apparently the battle of chapter 10 took place in the late fall as the weather was getting cold and rainy. Sieges were often harder on the surrounding army than those who lived inside the walls (at least at first). Thus where possible, sieges were begun when the rainy season and the cold had abated so that at least 8 months or so of good weather lay ahead. Thus as chapter 11 verse 1 states, it undoubtedly was in the spring when this happened.

Verse 1 also contains a meaningful wordplay that almost any Hebrew reader would have picked up on and seen the intent. I think it's pretty interesting so let's look at it. Where it says, "When kings go out", the Hebrew is "when **melech yatsah**". **Melech** is king, and **yatsah** is "going out"; and "going out" is a military term for engaging in battle. But next we are told that, "David sent out **Yo'av**". In Hebrew it says that "David **shalach** Yo'av". **Shalach** means "to send". It is a term that is customarily applied to a messenger, but not to a military general. A messenger in Hebrew is a **malach**. Both **melech** (king) and **malach** (messenger) are spelled identically (**mem, lamed, kaf-soffit**); the only difference is the way the word is vocalized. In other words, since written Hebrew is a consonant-only alphabet when the word is said out loud the vowel sounds have to be added. So the point that is cleverly obvious in the Hebrew (but gets lost in translation) is that a definite derogative tone is set that instead of David doing what Israelite kings are supposed to do (leading their army in battle), David used Joab like a messenger and sent him out with the army while David stayed safely and comfortably behind. So this whole story starts out on the wrong foot.

The subtle descent of David that we saw begin in the previous chapters is now becoming more visible and tangible. David is behaving like the typical gentile kings of the region. Thus

near the end of verse 1, our CJB (and most versions) say that, “But David stayed in Yerushalayim”. What it says in Hebrew is that David **yashav** in Yerushalayim. A more literal translation of **yashav** is not “staying” but rather is “sat”. **Yashav** is the opposite of **yatsah**. That is David **sat** rather than **go out**. To “stay” is a neutral term that is neither good nor bad; to “sit” is seen as a determined and conscious refusal to NOT go out. Who is David refusing? The Lord. It is God’s commandment that an Israelite king “go out” and lead rather than “sit” and “be served”. So this is not a matter of kingly prerogative: the story begins with intentional disobedience to the Lord on David’s part. And it gets progressively worse.

So in the spring/early summer season verse 2 has David living the life of leisure while his army is away fighting the enemy without his leadership. One hot afternoon he’s napping on the rooftop of his palace where there is a breeze when he awakes and takes a stroll. He looks down upon the citizenry’s housing below his palace and to his delight there is a simply gorgeous woman immersing herself in water. His lust kicks in to overdrive and instantly thinks he must have her for his harem.

David’s palace has been discovered by archeologists; it is located on the eastern slope, at the northern end, of the ridge that the City of David is built upon, so everything other than his palace lay at a lower elevation. Bathsheba’s residence was no doubt just inside the city wall of the City of David, near the Kidron ravine, because her husband **Uriyah** was a military officer and so was allowed a privileged residential location.

David sent messengers to see exactly who this beauty was; it turned out she was a married woman and her father was a fellow named **Eilam**. Her husband is referred to as **Uriyah** the Hittite. This did not mean he was a national Hittite (a citizen of the Hittite Empire); rather it simply meant that his family lineage were Hittites who somewhere along the line switched allegiance to Israel and thus became Israelites. His name means light of **Yah** (light of God), so with such a pious name that invokes the God of Israel there is no reasonable scenario that has him retaining his Hittite identity.

Again in verse 4 the translation to English hides an important wordplay that the Hebrew makes obvious. The phrase “sent a messenger” (**shalach malach**) to go fetch Bathsheba corresponds to verse 1 where the king (the **melech**) (sent) **shalach** Joab and the Israeli army off to war. Do you see the correlation? David wrongly sends his general off to war (and Bathsheba’s husband, of course, is part of the army who went), and now with the army gone David wrongly sends his messenger off to fetch Bathsheba for the purpose of adultery (I told you it got worse!)

The name **Bath-Sheva** is not as certain in its meaning as the name of her husband. The word bath (**bat**) means daughter (no, it is not a wordplay that she got the name **Bathsheba** because David saw her taking a bath). **Sheva** can be used in a couple of ways; it can indicate the number 7, or it can mean "oath". Some Sages contend that the name implies that she was **Eilam's** 7th daughter, or perhaps his 7th child or that the symbolism of the number 7 (divine completeness) was the intent. On the other hand other Sages say that it means oath and that her birth was considered the result of some type of vow made to the Lord by her parents. It was usual in ancient Biblical times that the mother named the child, although the father did have the prerogative to intervene if he saw fit. But another interesting note is that the bathing that was occurring (when David first got a glimpse of her) concerned ritual purity. The bathing was not about personal hygiene it was about obedience to God's commandments. Verse 4 states unemotionally (and just matter of fact) that David seduced her and had sexual relations with her. And that after she went home she sent word to David sometime later that she was now pregnant.

The Hebrew word used to add some information about the sexual encounter is that she had purified from her **tumah**. **Tumah** means uncleanness, and in this instance it is referring to **nidda**, the state of ritual uncleanness that occurs during a woman's period. We studied this back in Leviticus 15 and we won't get too detailed about it; rather I'll just make the points pertinent to this story about David.

First of all, once a woman starts her period she becomes ritually unclean. During the entire time of her flow she is not to have intercourse with her husband or he becomes ritually unclean as well. **After** the flow ends, she remains unclean for 7 more days; then on the 8th day she is to sacrifice 2 kosher birds at the Temple (the least expensive of all sacrifices), immerse herself in a Mikvah (a ritual bath), and now she is once again ritually clean. So a woman is ritually unclean due to her cycle for anywhere from 10 to 14 days total, or thereabouts. And so abstinence all during that time is called for, otherwise the man becomes ritually impure and has to go through the prescribed Levitical protocol to become clean again. And, whereas it is NOT sin for a woman to be unclean due to her period (after all it is not in her control nor is it her fault), it IS sin for a man to have sexual relations with her because it is a choice to disobey God's command not to.

When we first hear of Bathsheba (the moment David sees her) it is therefore the day of her **Mikvah**, the 8th day after her period has ended, and she is carrying out the last of the steps necessary to become ritually pure again. David is fully aware of this and so verse 4 makes it clear that when David took her to bed she had indeed completed the process of returning to ritual purity. How David was able to rationalize in his mind to commit adultery, but at the same

time to wait until his adultery partner was ritually clean so that he didn't commit that particular sin is beyond me.

So, get the picture. David has a sexual encounter with Bathsheba a day or two AFTER she has become ritually clean; and that means it is around 10 days or so AFTER her period has ended. Medically speaking, this is around the peak time for the woman's fertility. Again, because ancient Hebrews (and modern ones too, for that matter) are fully aware of all this fertility timing, then one understands all the more why this information was even recorded and thus seen as important. Since she was a healthy young female it was highly likely that pregnancy would be the result; and David knew that. Whether he factored that in or his hormones just got the better of him and it didn't matter is hard to gauge. But by no means was he ignorant of the possible consequences.

But another clear matter is that there is no way that this pregnancy could have been attributed to Bathsheba's husband (so that nobody would be any the wiser of her adultery) because he was away on active military duty and had been for some time. That she had a flow and was therefore in need of a *Mikvah* (a ritual bath) and purification tells us that indeed she was not pregnant at the time of her and David's encounter.

There are some other common sense and self-evident factors that we need to consider as the story continues. First is that David did not ensure secrecy by going himself, perhaps after dark, to Bathsheba and bringing her to his palace; rather he sent messengers. Messengers are palace servants. Servants talk among themselves, and David could not help but to be aware of that fact. There is no way that what David did was going to be kept a secret for very long. Second is that there is no hint of coercion. Bathsheba was not kidnapped, nor was she forced. While she was probably reluctant on the one hand, no doubt on the other to be intimate with the King of Israel had its allure. And, as a normal healthy woman it must have been tempting since her husband had been away for several weeks at the least.

Further in 1st Kings 1 and 2 we find a very aggressive and authoritative queen mother Bathsheba; this woman had some ambition and was not easily intimidated. So tradition as well as later Biblical stories about her leaves little room for doubt that she was complicit in her sexual fling with David and could not be viewed whatsoever as a victim.

Now that David knows she is pregnant he's got a problem. What happens when her husband finds out and makes a fuss? By all rights David ought to be executed for this. Of course NOBODY executes the king, but think about how this would sully David's sterling reputation and what the other military officers of pretty wives would think the next time David sent them off to war. David cannot have this happen so he devises a plan to hide his sin. The thing he seems to have completely put out of his mind (just as his predecessor Saul had done) was that despite any amount of cunning plans to hide his motives and dirty deeds from his subjects, God saw and knew all. And there would be consequences.

But truly, doesn't all that talk about us not being able to hide anything from the Lord seem like theory instead of reality to us sometimes? I'm sure it did to David. Don't we occasionally go ahead and do what we know is wrong, we intentionally break God's commandments, and then somehow think that if others don't find out about it THAT is the most important thing? If we can just keep it quiet and life moves on uninterrupted, we've more or less dodged a bullet. And why is it that we think that way? Because the earthly consequences of our bad behavior seem more real and important and immediate than any heavenly consequences so that's what we're mostly concerned about avoiding.

If we cheat on our spouse and our spouse finds out, he or she will probably not keep quiet about it and there goes most of our social circle. The spouse isn't likely to just forget about either, and so our lives are about to become miserable at home. Can we continue on at the same church or synagogue? Probably not. What happens if our family hears about it? We'll be humiliated and possibly shunned. More likely than not we'll be divorced, our family destroyed, our hard won assets split up and we'll be severely financially diminished if not devastated. So therefore all of our effort is focused on avoiding avoiding any of these calamities.

But what about God? What about the divine consequences of our sin as concerns our relationship with Him? That's usually easier to put aside and "worry about later" because we probably don't really expect to be struck by lightning, or suddenly get a brain tumor as punishment because (as too much false doctrine has it) God is obligated to wave His hand and forgive us if we're Believers. So the idea of severe punishment is actually only theory; we've been taught that Christ's blood negates the possibility of divine punishment so hallelujah! We're home free! Therefore from the spiritual perspective there doesn't seem to be too much for us to worry about (at least not in the near term). As wrong minded as it is, isn't that what our humanness often tells us and we choose to believe? David is soon to find out otherwise.

So David hurriedly devises a cover-up plan and sends for Bathsheba's husband, **Uriyah**. It would have taken a few days for the messenger to arrive at the battlefield in the Trans-Jordan,

and then for **Uriyah** to get back to Yerushalayim. When the king summons you, you make a beeline for his palace when you arrive; you don't eat, you don't visit anybody, you don't freshen up. **Uriyah** arrives and David is concerned not to seem anxious or behave suspiciously so he makes small talk with him and tries to be cool and friendly. He appropriately asks about **Uriyah's** commander, **Yo'av**. He asks about the soldiers and how things are going at the battle front. There is no mention of **Uriyah's** answers because the questions weren't sincere anyway. After the customary chit-chat David tries to dismiss **Uriyah** by graciously suggesting he goes home to "wash his feet". Foot washing was typical Middle Eastern custom practiced at all levels of society. Simply it was that after a long journey that always involved walking in open sandals, one's feet were hot, sore, and of course quite filthy. Full body bathing didn't occur very often for many reasons; for one it just wasn't seen as needed and for another, water was usually precious and took much effort to obtain and haul it around. But washing feet took only perhaps a quart of water and so anyone could do that.

Uriyah was dismissed by the king; but instead of going to his own home (just yards away from David's palace) he chose to stay with the king's royal court and servants. **Uriyah** considered himself as still on duty. When David found out he summoned **Uriyah** and wanted to know why he didn't go down to his own home? Now understand that on the one hand David telling **Uriyah** to go home and wash his feet wasn't seen as an official order; it was more of a permission to go his way and have some time with his wife. But on the other there was a reason David suggested this that went well beyond showing kindness to **Uriyah**. But for **Uriyah** he had to know that more was up than David making a general inquiry about Joab's health and how the soldiers were doing. You don't bring a military officer home on a several days journey to do what any courier could do. Certainly the king must have wanted something else from him so **Uriyah**, being a faithful soldier, hung around to find out what that something might be.

When David hears that **Uriyah** didn't go home, he calls for him and asks why he didn't? After all he had just arrived from a long and arduous journey. **Uriyah** answers that he just couldn't bring himself to sleep comfortably in his own bed, inside a nice home, and consort with his wife, when the other soldiers and all of his superiors were roughing it in tents, their lives on the line and far from home. Besides, even the precious Ark of the Covenant and the tribal leaders of Judah and Israel were living in tents near the battle. It would have tortured **Uriyah's** conscience and defied his military training as a leader to avail himself of such safety and comfort while his comrades were off fighting.

There is so much here to talk about. First notice how this must have pricked David's conscience to hear such words of unswerving loyalty and genuine concern for the sanctity of the Ark and safety of his fellow soldiers (and this from a mere soldier even if he was an officer). What **Uriyah** couldn't bring himself to do was something (even though his comrades at the battle scene would likely never have found out about it) that is the very thing that David was doing for himself. Here was the Ark of God, the tribal princes of Israel, all the top military

commanders, and thousands of soldiers away in a foreign land fighting and living in tough conditions while David was home availing himself not only of comfort and his own harem, but now seducing a soldier's lonely wife.

Second there is an interesting problem that some translations from Hebrew to English hide as regards the Ark of the Covenant. Now it would have been customary to have the Ark of God near the battle scene. Not close enough to be in danger, but near enough for the soldiers to feel comforted by its presence. No doubt the High Priest was there with it. But where it says in verse 11 that the Ark, Judah and Israel are staying in tents is just flat incorrect. The Hebrew word for tent is **ohel**; but **ohel** is not used here. Rather what is usually translated as "tent" (as in our CJB) is **Sukkah**. And since we have just finished celebrating the Biblical Feast of Sukkot, you know that a **Sukkah** is hardly the equivalent of a tent. Soldiers do not camp in a Sukkah. So what is going on here? Did they actually build a **Sukkah** for the Ark as well as for the princes of the 12 tribes? While we can't say with 100% certainty, it is nearly unthinkable. A **Sukkah** by design had a mostly open roof and it would have made for poor shelter for the tribal leaders, let alone the irreplaceable Ark of the Covenant.

Rather I think it is meant to be taken as a proper noun. The actual word used is **Sukkot**, which is the plural of **Sukkah**. And **Sukkot** is mentioned a few times in the Tanach as the name of a well known city in the Trans-Jordan located perhaps 20 miles from the siege at Rabbah. So what we're being told is that the tribal leaders, the High Priest, and the Ark were all located across the Jordan River in the city of **Sukkot**.

Another thing that we must notice; despite the fact that David had been king over a supposedly united Israel for several years, the southern tribes that formed Judah and the northern tribes that formed Israel (later called Ephraim) are still spoken of separately. As I have stated before, the unity of the north and the south was always fragile. And although it was a useful and happy fiction to think of a close connection of the 12 tribes under David and then Solomon, it has never really been so to any great extent. From the time the 12 tribes were formed up for their march out of Egypt, and then especially as they first entered Canaan under Joshua, they had grouped themselves into coalitions. And the two primary coalitions were the 10 tribes that lived to the north of Jerusalem, and the 2 tribes (mostly consisting of Judah) that lived to the south.

But why was David so insistent that **Uriyah** go home, and so personally concerned when he didn't? Why, especially, did David insist that **Uriyah** go home and bed his wife? Well, David now changes his tactics. In verse 12, fearing that any more pressure for **Uriyah** to go home would rouse suspicion, David tells **Uriyah** that he is to stay at the palace and then he can go home the next day. But the next day David holds a lavish banquet with the goal of getting

Uriyah happily drunk and hopefully this makes him irresistibly amorous for his wife. To David's frustration, that didn't work either.

The answer to "why?" David was trying so hard to get **Uriyah** to go home to his wife is becoming transparent; in fact the Sages say that by now **Uriyah** had a pretty good idea of what was going on and thus was possibly refusing to participate in the deception. The plan was that since Bathsheba was no more than perhaps 4 or 5 weeks pregnant by David, that if **Uriyah** slept with his wife the pregnancy could reasonably be explained as a result of **Uriyah's** surprise return home. Then David would be off the hook (and Bathsheba as well).

Desperate David gets more drastic in his cover-up attempt. The irony of this story is getting thicker; the faithfulness of **Uriyah** is exposing the unfaithfulness of David. And David is becoming ridden with anxiety and is furious.

We'll continue this next week.