

David *and* Bathsheba: Adultery *and* After



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Samuel 11, 12.

Memory Text: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

The marriage of David and Bathsheba is a model for how to do almost everything wrong. Born out of adultery, then complicated with deception and murder, it’s a sordid account of just how fallen humanity has become.

In the incident with Bathsheba, David broke the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”; the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”; the ninth commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”; and the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet” (*Exod. 20:1–17*). Whatever pressures David put on her, Bathsheba put herself in a very vulnerable position when she washed herself in sight of the king’s house. Whoever imagined that a little bath water could be so dangerous? Whether a deliberate ploy to entice the king or just an unfortunate lapse in judgment, her indiscretion ended in dire consequences for them both.

In the end, the fact that David received forgiveness stands as a powerful testimony of God’s grace for even the most inexcusable sins, sins that weren’t just sins but crimes. While we marvel at how low David stooped, what’s even more marvelous is that God’s grace extended even to the depths of human depravity. How fortunate for us.

The Week at a Glance: The story of David and Bathsheba ever bears witness to how even the most godly people, unless careful, can fall into the worst of sin. How fortunate that we have a God who forgives the unforgivable.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 8.

Precursor to a Fall

Read 2 Samuel 3:1–5 and 2 Samuel 5:13. What’s in these texts that helps us understand why David would do what he did with Bathsheba and, on the other hand, helps us understand why his act of adultery was even more heinous?

Proverbs says that “the eyes of man are never satisfied” (*Prov. 27:20*). How true in the case of David. By the time he lusted after Bathsheba, he already had more than six wives and who knows how many concubines. *And yet, that was not enough?* And worse, to satisfy his lusts he had to take another man’s wife?

We shouldn’t miss the important principle here: Any deviation from the will of God opens the soul up to more and more folly and deception. By transgressing God’s will, David opened himself to more temptation. The indulgence of a passion, far from removing the passion, only makes that passion stronger and stronger. Had David followed God’s ideal, one man, one wife, he would have been less open to Satan’s temptations. In this case the floodgates were opened, and David was swept away in the deluge.

Read James 1:12–15. What warning to us is the Lord giving here?

Those who have ever struggled with addiction, with uncontrollable desires of any kind, know how sin is never satisfied. The more you indulge it, the more you want it; and the more you want it, the easier it is to make excuses for it until you are enslaved by it. As Jesus said, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (*John 8:34, NIV*).

What has been your own experience with powerful temptations, with addictions, with drives that seem to control you rather than vice versa? What promises do we have for victory? What choices do you have to make in order to make those promises real in your own life?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Psalm 51:10*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: God pardons those who ask forgiveness in faith.

Feel: The joy of forgiveness.

Do: Determine to keep love alive through trust in God.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. When Kings Go to War (*2 Sam. 11:2–5, 26; 12:19*)

A David looks out over the rooftops of his city and sees the beautiful wife of one of his soldiers bathing. Why does David's prosperity pose more danger to him than poverty and persecution did?

B God tells David "a son shall be born to thee. His name shall be Solomon." This is prophesied well in advance of the adultery he commits with Bathsheba. What does the fact that the promised son comes from Bathsheba, and not from one of his other wives, teach us about God's forgiveness?

C The fourfold curse David pronounces upon himself to Nathan is paid in the blood of his sons. What is it about God's justice that allows Him to be so merciful?

II. Thou Art the Man (*2 Sam. 11:6–25*)

A David, intoxicated with lust for Bathsheba, loses all sense of his obligation to God. How do we guard against this indifference?

B Bathsheba: temptress or victim? She does not speak during the seduction or subsequent plot to murder her husband. Some would judge her silence to be complicity with the crimes. Or perhaps, the parable of the poor man's love for his one sheep indicates Uriah's love for his wife and hers for him. How should we interpret things on which the Scripture is silent?

III. After God's Own Heart (*2 Sam. 12:1–24, Psalm 51*)

A After the death of their son, David comforts Bathsheba. Sharing their pain together helps them both heal. What pattern is here for spouses confronting the loss of a child or other loss in marriage?

B How does God take the results of David's lust and covetousness and bring good from the ugly? In what ways does God do this for us?

► **Summary:** Confession, faith in God, and prayer bring the joy of forgiveness.

The Fall

Read 2 Samuel 11:1–5. What were the steps that led to David’s fall? At what points in the progression of events could he have stopped before sinning? What Old Testament stories would he have known about that he could have drawn inspiration from? *See, for instance, Gen. 39:7–14.*

The initial temptation from “seeing” comes to all of us. This may be involuntary and is not sin. The next step is stopping to investigate. This could be treading on very dangerous ground and may be sin in the mind. It could be very difficult to keep from getting into the next and final step, the actual misdeed.

It’s clear, though, that right from the start David knew exactly what he was doing. He had inquired about who she was, and even though he was told, directly, that she was the wife of another man, he, nevertheless, had her brought to him in order to fulfill his own lusts. What other reason did he have to do this? She was already married, so he wasn’t interested in making her a wife. He wasn’t interested in falling in love with her. He was, it seems, driven purely by passion.

Plus, was he not the king? Was he not used to getting whatever he wanted? Why not, then, this woman, as well?

Read again 2 Samuel 11:4. What can we tell about Bathsheba and how she responded to David’s seduction?

Was she flattered by the attention of the king, or did she try to resist his advances? Might she have been purposely washing herself in his sight, or was she taking for granted that the king would be off fighting with his army, as was the custom in the spring, according to the Bible (*2 Sam. 11:1*)? The text makes no indication that the king had forced her, such as in Ammon’s rape of Tamar (*2 Sam. 13:14*). Nor does it say that she willingly gave herself to him. Whatever the details, David—who should have known better—took advantage of this young woman and led them both into sin.

Sexual drives can be very strong. How careful are we not to take advantage of these weaknesses in others and exploit them for personal satisfaction or gain? What kind of messages are you sending by your words, your dress, your body language?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

HEAD OF STATE HAS AFFAIR WITH WIFE OF WAR HERO. Sounds like the latest political sex scandal just made the front page of yet another tabloid, right? Guess again. While the Bible doesn't phrase it quite like that, the story of David and Bathsheba does sound as though it could have been ripped from today's headline news.

The Bible records this sordid chapter in the life of "a man after [God's] own heart" (*1 Sam. 13:14*) for more than mere shock value. It's a warning about what happens when reason shuts down and lust holds full sway. David would have done well to have taken a page out of Job's book—or at least one text—in which Job makes an oath with his eyes (*Job 31:1*) to look at only one woman. Though moral purity and marital happiness often seem rare these days, it doesn't have to be that way. Not if we allow Jesus to fill us with love that draws others in only one direction: toward Him. (Resolve to keep your hearts pure. Look for light in this week's lesson to keep your resolve strong.)

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

Bible Commentary

I. Precursor to a Fall

Wars, the affairs of state, and David's foolish conformity to the custom of having multiple wives and concubines all combined to sap the foundations of his spirituality. He progressively drifted away from the simple rustic life during which he could sincerely sing, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. . . . He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." David had become jaded, worldly, sated with success, power, and importance. Gradually losing sight of his own dependence on God, he trusted his own strength, prowess, and ingenuity.

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The Cover-up

In 2 Samuel 11:5, Bathsheba tells David that she's pregnant. That she just assumed David was the father indicates that she probably hadn't been with anyone else, including her own husband.

Read 2 Samuel 11:6–25. Does Bathsheba play a role in the cover-up of her husband? Explain.

We have no indication whatsoever that Bathsheba knew of David's plans for her husband. He probably wanted it that way. The fact, however, that David tried to get Uriah to go home to his wife probably indicated that David was sure that she wasn't going to tell her husband that she got pregnant by the king.

Why not? See Lev. 20:10.

David had her in a bind. Had she confessed, she would have faced the possibility of death. And had it come down to it, David would have denied everything (after all, he committed murder in order to try to get out of it). How much easier if all he had to do was tell a lie! *Why would I, with all these wives and concubines, take the wife of one of my most trusted and valiant soldiers?* And Bathsheba, pregnant with another man's baby, would have had no way to prove his guilt either. Who would believe her word against a beloved and powerful king with all these women at his disposal? She was totally helpless.

Thus, from her perspective, what would she gain from confessing? David apparently knew this, which was why he felt safe in trying to get Uriah into her presence. As it turned out, of course, that never happened.

Look at how quickly one moment of uncontrolled passion led to a spiral of sin and crime in a man of God. How carefully are you controlling your passions, your desires? How can you better place yourself in a position where you are less tempted by things that can lead you down this same horrid path?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**II. The Fall**

David's armies had been victorious over all their foes. It was at this very point, when complacency was likeliest to set in, that Satan seized his opportunity to present flesh-pleasing allurements to David. The stress of war was over. David had forgotten the need for perpetual vigilance against the unremitting enemy of his soul. The lesson is the same for us. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (*Rom. 11:20–22, 1 Cor. 10:12*).


III. The Cover-up

The loss of conscious integrity opens the way for endless deceptions and denials, which further weaken the fabric of character and often entangle one in crimes that would have seemed to the perpetrators impossible to commit. Entrenched deception is a ruthless force. It has no stopping place, no boundaries beyond which it will not go. If David had made a clean sweep of matters even after his adultery with Bathsheba, it could not have gone for him and others as badly as it did. Uriah and many of his soldiers died as a result of David's duplicity and cowardice; Joab became an accomplice in this crime; Ahithophel turned traitor; Bathsheba was left in perplexity and emotional ravagement scarcely conceivable to anyone who has not been enmeshed in such treacherous toils. David's crime created a vile precedent for his son Amnon, who dragged his unwilling sister Tamar into incest. This also led to the shedding of innocent blood (*2 Samuel 13*). David's one transgression spawned a riptide of moral devastation that helped lead to the ruin of Israel as a kingdom. His sin irrecoverably undermined the people's confidence in their rulers and gave them a pretext to transgress as they saw fit.

Consider This: Have you ever committed a crime? Have you made this matter right, or are you still living under a cloud of concealed guilt and condemnation? If so, seek sound scriptural and pastoral counsel, and do what is right (*Ps. 32:5–7, Prov. 28:13*).

IV. The Wages of Sin

Bathsheba's husband and her child by David were casualties of this illicit alliance. David had pronounced the death sentence against himself when Nathan told a parable depicting the essential features of David's crime (*2 Sam. 12:1–14*). David was subject to a death greater

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The Wages of Sin

Read 2 Samuel 11:26, 27. What does this tell us about both David and Bathsheba?

Bathsheba mourned for her dead husband. What might have made her grief even worse was the knowledge that, perhaps, she was implicated in his death. How much she knew, at that time, regarding David's deeds we don't know, but eventually the rumors started spreading about David's sins. Meanwhile, David did the only "honorable" thing he could and took her to him as a wife. Let's assume that she needed at least a month to know that she was pregnant; let's assume, too, that she mourned for her husband 30 days (*Num. 20:29*). Depending, then, on how long it took David to get Uriah killed, it's still hard to see how anyone could not have known something was amiss regarding the timing of this child's birth.

Read 2 Samuel 12:13–23. What principle do we see operating here?

It's hard to understand why an innocent baby should suffer for sins he had nothing to do with. But this is the horrible nature of sin. It leads to the suffering of others, even those who might have had nothing to do with the sin. How many spouses and children have suffered terribly because of the sin of adultery committed by a parent? Sin never happens in isolation. Sooner or later, in one way or another, the consequences appear. *What other examples can you find in the Bible of this same principle?*

Read 2 Samuel 12:24. What does this tell us about the relationship between David and Bathsheba?

Theirs was, from the start, a marriage that never should have been. David, though, shows here compassion for her, and they eventually have another child together.

Forgiven sin can bring about horrible consequences anyway. What lesson can you take from this story as you daily confront temptations to sin?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

than mere execution for his dual crime of adultery and murder. He was subject to the penalty of eternal death (*see Rom. 3:23, Rev. 20:12–15*). Had David not repented so thoroughly and sincerely, his end would have been no better than King Saul's. But see Psalms 32 and 51. This story is a testimony, not to God's permissiveness but to the great power of His forgiveness and of restoring grace (*see Isa. 27:5; Mic. 7:18, 19*).

“Though David repented of his sin and was forgiven and accepted by the Lord, he reaped the baleful harvest of the seed he himself had sown. The judgments upon him and upon his house testify to God's abhorrence of the sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 723.

Consider This: Whoever is forgiven much, loves much, but at the same time he must remain contritely distrustful of himself and recognize that some of the consequences of transgression must remain with him all his life. Do you see David's story as a license to sin or as a beacon of warning? Explain.

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Among the leading reasons that people give for adultery are loneliness in marriage (emotional alienation from one's spouse), feelings of greater compatibility with a forbidden partner, and sense of need to feel affirmed by someone else's unconditional love. Among the least recognized and least frequently acknowledged of reasons are lust, self-centeredness, lack of commitment to working through marital problems, emotional revenge, ego gratification over being a successful seducer, immature escapism, spiritual darkness, corruption of heart.

Scripture treats adultery as the abominable, inexcusable thing it is (*1 Sam. 12:10–12; Mal. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10*). Adultery robes the mind in tangling veils of illusion, duplicity, and lurid machination. It turns vibrant people into skulking shadows, whose lives are a lie. “Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul” (*Prov. 6:32*).

Having said all this, we must remember that God is willing and able to forgive the adulterer, but unless the perpetrator's repentance is sincere and

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David and Bathsheba: The Final Days

After the birth of Solomon, Bathsheba disappears from the pages of the Bible until years later, at the end of David's reign. She would have become simply another one of David's wives had it not been for the fact that their next son, Solomon, was destined to take the throne of Israel. In 1 Chronicles 22:5–9, David stated that the Lord told him that Solomon was to be the next king.

Read 1 Kings 1:1–27. What is happening here? Why would Adonijah believe that he should have the throne before Solomon? See 2 Samuel 3:4.

For whatever reason, God chose Solomon to be the heir to the throne. Bathsheba, after the birth of Solomon, doesn't appear again until Adonijah's revolt, where she and Nathan inform David of what is happening. Both she and Nathan know that Solomon, not Adonijah, was the Lord's choice.

David comforts Bathsheba after their son dies. And now as the kingdom is poised on the brink of civil war, more than ever, Bathsheba needs the king's assurance to secure the succession of their son.

Read 1 Kings 1:28–31. Notice her response to the king after he gives her the reassurance she longs for. What might that say about their relationship, as well? How does Bathsheba's approach and respect for the king, her husband, model how we, as a church, should approach our King, Jesus, with our petitions?

Any kind of a good relationship—marriage, friendship, or one between a parent and child—needs nurturing. What immediate relationships of yours need some mending, some nurture, some work? What steps can you take to make that relationship better?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

deep, he will return as a dog to its vomit or a sow to wallowing in the mire.

Consider This: Read Psalm 51 (which he wrote in response to the prophet Nathan’s indictment of him over the affair with Bathsheba) and look for the dimensions and intensity of David’s repentance and his recognition that without a new heart altogether he will remain a victim of his foul, relentless passions.

Thought Questions:

- 1 What evidence in the psalm shows David’s awareness that he was not in a saving connection with God as long as he was sinning? (*vss. 51:1, 2, 6–12, 17*).
- 2 How important to David—and to God—was heartbroken repentance for sins committed? (*Ps. 34:18, Isa. 57:15, Rom. 2:1–11*). What bearing does this question have on relations between husbands and wives? (*Eph. 4:29–32, 5:19–33, 1 Pet. 3:1–9*).

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Why are the most scrupulous or moral ideals alone not a sufficient safeguard against corruption of character and conduct? (*Jer. 10:23, 13:23, 17:9, Rom. 3:1–26, Eph. 4:22–24*).

Evaluate your life. What do you read, watch, and listen to? Identify which of your activities may be fraying your morals (*Phil. 4:8*). What do you plan to do about this? How important to you and for you is action on this issue?

Who alone is a safe model for our character development? Review Psalms 37, 73, and 94; Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 722–726.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Moral Standards,” pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*.

“Many have murmured at what they called God’s injustice in sparing David, whose guilt was so great, after having rejected Saul for what appear to them to be far less flagrant sins. But David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence. . . .

“Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God’s promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: ‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.’ Isaiah 27:5. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.’ Isaiah 55:7.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 726.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the story of Nathan with David (*2 Sam. 12:1–8*). Notice how obvious it should have been to David, right from the start, that this story was about him. And yet, he totally missed it. What lessons can we take from this about how easy it is to deceive ourselves regarding sin? As a class, talk about what precautions we can take to protect ourselves, and each other, from falling into such gross self-deception.
- 2 As a class, read Psalm 51 together. Discuss the elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ that are found there. What does it teach us about the power of God’s grace in our lives?
- 3 What practical spiritual truths can we learn from the story of David and Bathsheba that can help us avoid the kind of mistakes made here? What can we do to help each other avoid the kind of pit that David fell into?

Summary: Take heed—even the mightiest among us can fall; and the mightier they are, the worse the consequences. The story of David and Bathsheba contains a powerful message about the cost of sin, as well as the greatness of God’s grace.