

David and Bathsheba

Ecclesiastes chapter 10 describes how: “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour” (Eccl. 10:1). We have an illustration of this in the life of David, a man who was renowned for being after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). His sin with Bathsheba sullies the record of his military prowess and adherence to the ways of Yahweh. Wherever his life is made known, so is his indiscretion, as a little folly in the apothecary’s ointment. Although he did it in private, it would be made known before all – yet he did repent and find forgiveness. Hence, Romans 4:6-7 provides David as an example of how God “justifieth the ungodly” through their repentance and faith.

The mischief began with David lying upon his bed. Yahweh had chosen him to be a warrior, to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, yet in 2 Samuel 11:2, we find him not on the frontline fighting earnestly (as on previous occasions), but lying in bed, enjoying home comforts. Thus we read:

“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” (2 Sam. 11:2).

James describes the process of temptation in terms of a seducing woman:

“... every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:13-14).

In this, we see the example of David, enticed by the beauty of BathSheba. He was seduced, and engaged with an adulterous union with her. Then, as a result of that sin, a child was produced – which child died in due course. David succumbed to the “lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh” (1 Jno. 2:16), and entangled himself with the cares of this life, rather than pleasing He who had chosen him to be a soldier (2 Tim. 2:4).

Proverbs 24 describes the folly of sleeping in a time when diligence is required:

“yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 24:34).

Hence in Nathan’s parable, sin, as a travelling man, came knocking at the door, and David used the substance of another man to satisfy his needs. Rather than to make a covenant with his eyes (Job. 31:1), he yielded to Sin, and trespassed against Uriah, and also Yahweh Himself. He “arose from off his bed”, and looked upon Uriah’s wife, to lust after her (cp. Mat. 5:28), and committed adultery. Moreover, he also sought to cover up his sin, by inviting Uriah, who was fighting on the front line, to return home, and enjoy home comforts, including lying with his wife. Then, it would have appeared that the child would be his rather than David’s! But Uriah was a man of integrity. Although he was a Gentile, he fought in Israel’s battles under the leadership of Josiah, and was one of David’s trusted valiant men (1 Chron. 11:41). His heart

was set in fighting the battle, and engaging in a warfare of faith. He refused home comforts, as the record informs us:

“and David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king’s house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house, with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? Why then didst thou not go down unto thine house. And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents; and my lord Joab, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, **I will not do this thing**” (2 Sam. 11:8-11).

Hence then David sought to destroy Uriah, by the hands of the enemies of Israel:

“... it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 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” (2 Sam. 11:14-15).

So it was that David destroyed Uriah by the hand of the Ammonites – in a manner that was similar to faithless Saul’s attempt to destroy David by the hand of the Philistines (1 Sam. 18:25). Indeed, the Jews had Jesus himself put to death by the hand of the Romans.

Nathan the prophet was instrumental in inducing David to repent. He came to David, and described a scenario which mirrored the actions of David, albeit in a veiled way, and invited him to pass judgment upon the wronged party. David, in his response, went beyond the requirements of the Law, and pronounced his verdict: “David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, as Yahweh liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die ...” Then Nathan revealed the real application of this scenario: **“Thou art the man ...”**. Whereupon David confessed his sin: “I have sinned against Yahweh”.

This is the background for several of the Psalms, particularly Psalms 32 and 51, which we are to shortly consider. But it is significant to note that there are also a number of allusions back to these events in the New Testament book of Romans, and chapter 2.

ALLUSIONS IN ROMANS 2

Romans chapter 2 reads: “thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another; for thou that judgest doest the same things” (verse 1). So, as in condemning “the man” of Nathan’s story, David was condemning himself. Verse 22 reads:

“Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery”

– which fits David’s example as an adulterer. Verse 16 speaks of “the day when God shall judge the secrets of men”, whereas 2 Sam. 12:12 records the words of Nathan: “thou didst it secretly”. Again, verse 24 speaks of how “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you ...” which echoes verse 14 of 2 Sam. 12: “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast

given great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die”.

But interestingly, as an allusion of how a Gentile – Uriah was a example to a Jew, we read in Romans 2:

“... when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (Rom. 2:14-15).

Uriah had the principles of the law written in his heart, and his conscience would not allow him to go home, when he should be contending on the battle front with his lord Joab.

However, whilst in Romans, we look to chapter 4, a few pages later, which alludes back to David’s repentance, and acceptance before his God:

“... to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, he faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:5-8).

David then, is an example of the ungodly being justified by faith. It is interesting that the last two sentences from this quote come from Psalm 32; another Psalm to do with the repentance of David following his sin with Bath-sheba. This Psalm reveals that his sin played heavily upon his mind. Before he confessed it before the prophet, David speaks of how it troubled him greatly: “when I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my groaning all the day long” (Psa. 32:3). But having confessed it, he spoke of the blessedness of the man who is forgiven, as cited above.

It is against this background that we turn to Psalm 51, which again details David’s confession, and request for forgiveness:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. **Wash me** thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me” (Psa. 51:1-3).

Notice the washing here: the washing away of his sin. His sin came about as a direct result of seeing Bath-sheba washing herself upon the roof of her house. That was the beginning, when his lust drew him away, being enticed by that which he saw (Jas. 1:14). But now, the penitent David beseeches Yahweh to blot out his sin, and to wash him from it.

There does seem to be an allusion here, to the Trial of Jealousy as described in Numbers chapter 5. This chapter describes the procedure to be followed if a man suspected that his wife had committed adultery. As part of the process, the priest had to take some of the dust from the floor of the Tabernacle, mix it with water, and give it to the woman to drink. There were a number of curses that were written in a book, which the woman would experience, should

she be found guilty. These curses were then blotted out of the book by the same water that the woman was to partake of: if found not guilty, she would not experience the curses described.

In the case of David, it was he who was guilty. Some speculate as to Bath-sheba's own willingness to participate, but the record does not condemn her for what took place. In this procedure, if the woman was innocent, the curses were blotted out – but David in recognizing his own guilt, asked for his sins to be blotted out instead.

Returning to Psalm 32, in it, David spoke of his troubled conscience (Psa. 32:3) and subsequent relief at having made confession:

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Yahweh; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psa. 32:5).

Indeed, as we saw above, the first verse of this Psalm is cited in Romans 4, and given a general application to believers:

“ ... David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:7-8).

The true believers in Christ have their faith imputed as righteousness, and are amongst the justified ungodly. The Lord has blotted out their sin because of their repentance (Acts 3:19), after the example of David of old. By contrast to Uriah, whose condemnation was written, as he was overcome by the Ammonitish power, it is said of Jesus that he has “forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:13-15).

We can take great comfort from the examples of both David and Uriah – a Jew and a Gentile. David, despite committing adultery and murder, was forgiven the iniquity of his trespass. And Uriah's heart, rather than indulging in home comforts, was with his lord Joab on the front line of the battle. He was condemned by the writing of the letter sent by his hand, and overcome by the power of the Ammonites. Interestingly, his name means: “Yah is my Light.” The Lord Jesus has spoiled principalities and powers, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances against us. We can look forward in faith and anticipation, so that being delivered from the works and kingdom of darkness, we can be given “the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

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