

David

At the turn of the year, at the time when kings go campaigning, David sent Joab and his guards and all Israel. They massacred the Ammonites and laid siege to Rabbah; David however remained in Jerusalem. It happened towards evening when David had arisen from resting and was strolling on the palace roof, that he caught sight from the roof of a woman bathing. She was very beautiful. David made enquiries about this woman and was told, "Why, that is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite." David then sent messengers to fetch her. She came to him, and he lay with her, just after her purification from her period. She then returned home. The woman conceived, and sent word to David, "I am pregnant."

David then sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." Whereupon Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah reached him, David asked how Joab was, and how the army was, and how the war was going. David then said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." Uriah left the palace and was followed by a present from the king's table. Uriah, however, slept at the palace gate with all his master's bodyguard, and did not go down to his house.

This was reported to David. "Uriah", they said, "has not gone down to his house." So David asked Uriah, "Haven't you just arrived from the journey? Why didn't you go down to your house?" To which Uriah replied: "The Ark, Israel and Judah are lodged in huts; my master Joab and my lord's guards are camping in the open. Am I to go to my house, then, and eat and drink and sleep with my wife? As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I shall not do this thing!" David then said, "Stay on here today; tomorrow I shall send you off." So Uriah stayed that day in Jerusalem. The next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk. In the evening Uriah went out and bedded down with his master's bodyguard, but did not go down to his house.

Next morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by Uriah. In the letter he wrote: "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest and then fall back, so that he gets wounded and killed." Joab, then besieging the city, stationed Uriah at a point where he knew there would be tough fighters. The people of the city sallied out and engaged Joab; there were casualties in the army among David's guards, and Uriah the Hittite was killed as well.

Joab sent David a full account of the battle. To the messenger he gave this order: "When you have finished telling the king all about the battle, if the king's anger is aroused and he says, 'Why did you go near the town to give battle? Didn't you know that they would shoot from the ramparts? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal? Wasn't it a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the ramparts, causing his death at Thebez? Why did you go near the ramparts?' you are to say: 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too.'"

So the messenger set off and, on his arrival, told David everything that Joab had instructed him to say. David flew into a rage with Joab and said to the messenger, "Why did you go near the ramparts? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal? Wasn't it a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the ramparts, causing his death at Thebez? Why did you go near the ramparts?" The messenger replied to David, "Their men had won an initial advantage and then came out to engage us in the open. We then drove them back into the gateway, but the archers shot at your retainers from the ramparts. Some of them lost their lives, and servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too."

David then said to the messenger, "Say to Joab: 'Do not take the matter to heart; the sword devours now one, then another. Attack the town in greater force and destroy it.' That will encourage him." When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for her husband. When the period of mourning was over, David sent to have her brought to his house; she became his wife and bore him a son. But what David had done displeased the Lord.

The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David. He came to him and said: "In the same town were two men: one rich, the other poor. The rich man had flocks and herds in great abundance; the poor man had nothing but a ewe lamb, only a single little one which he had bought. He fostered it and it grew up with him and his children, eating his bread, drinking from his cup, sleeping in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

"When a traveller came to stay, the rich man would not take anything from his own flock or herd to provide for the wayfarer who had come to him. Instead, he stole the poor man's lamb and prepared that for his guest."

David flew into a great rage with the man. "As the Lord lives," he said to Nathan, "the man who did this deserves to die. For doing such a thing and for showing no pity, he shall make fourfold restitution for the lamb."

Nathan then said to David, "You are the man. The Lord, the God of Israel, says this: 'I anointed you king of Israel, I saved you from Saul's clutches. I gave you your master's household and your master's wives into your arms, I gave you the House of Israel and the House of Judah; and if this is too little I shall give you other things as well. Why did you show contempt for the Lord, doing what displeases him? You put Uriah the Hittite to the sword, you took his wife to be your wife, causing his death by the sword of the Ammonites. For this, your household will never be free of the sword, since you showed contempt for me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite, to make her your wife.'

"The Lord says this: 'Out of your own household I shall raise misfortune for you. Before your very eyes I shall take your wives and give them to your neighbour, who will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You have worked in secret, but I shall work this for all Israel to see, in broad daylight.'"

David said to Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan then said to David, "The Lord for his part forgives your sin: you are not to die. But since you have outraged the Lord by doing this, the child born to you will die." And Nathan went home.

The Lord struck the child which Uriah's wife had borne to David, and it fell gravely ill. David pleaded with the Lord for the child; he kept a strict fast, and went home and spent the night lying on the ground, covered with sackcloth. The officials of the household stood round him, intending to get him off the ground; but he refused, nor would he take food with them. On the seventh day the child died. David's retainers were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. "Even when the child was alive," they thought, "we reasoned with him and he would not listen to us; how can we tell him that the child is dead?" David, however, noticed that his retainers were whispering among themselves, and realised that the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked the officers. They replied, "He is dead."

David got off the ground, bathed and anointed himself and put on fresh clothes. Then he entered the Lord's sanctuary and prostrated himself. On returning to his house he asked to be served with food and ate it. His retainers said, "Why are you acting like this? When the child was alive you fasted and wept; now the child is dead you get up and take food!" He replied, "When the child was alive I fasted and wept because I kept thinking, 'Who knows? Perhaps the Lord will take pity on me and the child will live'. But now that he is dead why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him; but he cannot come back to me."

David consoled his wife, Bathsheba. He went to her and slept with her. She conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she called Solomon.

