

Bathsheba

HER NAME MEANS

“The Seventh Daughter” or “The Daughter of an Oath”

HER CHARACTER: Her beauty made her victim to a king’s desire. Though it is difficult to discern her true character, she seems to have found the courage to endure tragedy, winning the king’s confidence and eventually securing the kingdom for her son Solomon.

HER SORROW: To have been molested by a supposedly godly man, who then murdered her husband. To have suffered the loss of one of her sons.

HER JOY: To have given birth to five sons, one of whom became king of Israel after David’s death.

KEY SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25

Monday

HER STORY

*B*athsheba squeezed the sponge, moving it rhythmically across her body as though to calm the restless cadence of her thoughts. Normally, she looked forward to the ritual bath marking the end of her monthly period, but tonight the water soothed her skin without refreshing her spirit.

She should be glad for the cool breeze. For flowers. For a lush harvest. But spring could also yield its crop of sorrows, as she well knew. Spring was the season for armies and battles. Once the rains had ceased and the harvest had been gathered, men marched off to war, leaving their women behind.

Bathsheba shivered as she stood up. Though her husband, Uriah, was a seasoned soldier, she still worried about him, wishing she could fall asleep in his arms. But he was camped with the rest of the king's army beneath the open skies of Rabbah, an Ammonite fortress some forty miles northeast of Jerusalem.

The king rose from his bed, unable to sleep. Pacing across the palace roof, he gazed at the city below. Jerusalem seemed calm, a city at peace with itself though at war with its neighbors. Soon his soldiers would gather a great harvest of Ammonite captives, laborers for his expanding kingdom. The casual observer might have thought David a man at peace with his growing power. Instead, the king could not quiet an increasing sense of discontent.

Then, in the half-light, David noticed the figure of a young woman bathing in the walled garden of a house below him. He leaned against the outer edge of the roof for a closer view. Wet hair curling languidly against skin soft as lamb's wool. Breasts like rounded apples. He reached as though to steal a touch. Unaware of watching eyes, the woman toweled herself dry and stepped into the house. He waited and watched, but even the king could not see through walls.

Over the next few days, David made inquiries and discovered that the vision had a name: She was Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah the Hittite. He sent for her. She came to him and became pregnant with his child.

Fearing discovery, the king ordered Uriah home from battle. But the soldier surprised him by refusing to spend the night with his wife: "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

So David convinced Uriah to spend another day in Jerusalem, managing to get him drunk. Surely the wine would overcome his scruples. But it didn't. So David played his last card, entrusting Bathsheba's husband with a letter to Joab, commander of the army. It read: "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

So Uriah died by treachery, and David claimed Bathsheba as his wife, her child as his own.

One day, the prophet Nathan approached David, saying: “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup, and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

David was incensed: “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house.’”

David’s lust for Bathsheba marked the beginning of his long decline. Though God forgave him, he still suffered the consequences of his wrongdoing. His sin was a whirlpool that dragged others into its swirling path. And despite David’s prayer and pleading, God allowed the son David had conceived with Bathsheba to die from an illness.

But why did Bathsheba have to suffer along with the man who molested her and murdered her husband? Though the story gives us little insight into her true character, it is hardly likely that Bathsheba was in a position to refuse the king. In Nathan’s parable, in fact, she is depicted as an innocent lamb. Why, then, have so many people painted her as a seductress? Perhaps Bathsheba’s innocence is too painful to face. That a good person can suffer such tragedies, especially at the hands of a godly person, appalls us. Worse yet, God

punishes both David and Bathsheba by taking their son. If we can believe that Bathsheba had an affair with David, we could accept her suffering more easily; her guilt would make David's sin seem less grave and God's punishment less cruel.

Though Bathsheba may not have understood the reasons for her suffering, God gave her favor with King David, making her both a powerful queen and the mother of David's successor, Solomon, who became famous for his great wisdom.

RITUAL BATHING

A warm tub of water with a fragrance of flowers, soaking, eyes closed. That's the sort of image conjured up in most of our minds when it comes to bathing. But in Bathsheba's day, most bathing took place not for the purpose of physical cleanliness—people of that time had little knowledge of the spread of disease and germs through uncleanness. Most bathing took place in order to become ritually clean after a period of being unclean.

Bathsheba had just completed her monthly period. The flow of blood was finished; the seven days prescribed in Leviticus 15:19 were past, and she now needed to cleanse herself. She probably stood in or near a basin of water, using a sponge or cloth to clean herself, then either squeezing water over herself as a rinse or pouring water from a pitcher over her body.

Scripture mentions cleansing with water hundreds of times, most of them referring to ritual rather than physical cleansing. Cleansing took place after many kinds of skin diseases were healed (Leviticus 14:8), and after men and women had unusual discharges (Leviticus 15:13). Men and women both had to wash themselves after sexual intercourse in order to be ceremonially clean (Leviticus 15:18). Priests cleansed themselves before offering sacrifices (Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 8:6), and the sacrifices themselves were washed before being offered to God (Leviticus 1:9).

Physical cleansing more often took the form of washing one's hands before eating or washing one's feet when entering a house. Dirty, dusty roads and open sandals made foot washing something that needed to be done frequently. Since foot washing was commonly the job of the lowest member or servant of a household, Jesus modeled a splendid humility when he bathed his disciples' feet in the upper room (John 13:5).

The Bible sometimes describes the righteous as those with "clean hands" (Job 17:9; Psalm 24:4). Cleanliness is also used in Scripture as

a metaphor for being forgiven: “I am clean and free from guilt” (Job 33:9). “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7). In the end times, the bride of Christ will be dressed in “fine linen, bright and clean” (Revelation 19:8).

We live in a culture that glorifies outward cleanliness with our soaps and lotions and toothpastes and disinfectants, our bathing and brushing, our washing and wiping. But how concerned are we with inner cleanliness? Do we have clean hands but spirits filthy with hate? Do we have soft, clean-shaven legs but hearts hardened to the hurts of others? Do we have clean, blemish-free faces that seldom smile? Outward cleanliness is admirable—but only if an inward cleanliness accompanies it.

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25.

1. What part do you think Bathsheba played in the events of 2 Samuel 11:2–4? Totally innocent? Artful seductress? Something in between? Explain why you think so.
2. How do you think Bathsheba felt when she realized she was pregnant with David's child? Why did she immediately tell him?
3. God called David a "man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22; cf. 1 Samuel 13:14). How could God say this, given the awful things he did to Bathsheba and Uriah?
4. What do you think Bathsheba was doing and feeling while her son got sick and died? Why do you think the Bible focuses on David's response rather than hers?
5. Solomon's name from the Lord was actually Jedidiah (2 Samuel 12:24–25), which means "loved by the LORD." What sense of God's restoration for Bathsheba and David does this name give you?
6. What does this story say to you about your own experience as a sinner and/or a victim of others' sin?

HER PROMISE

*T*he story of David and Bathsheba outlines in graphic detail the horror of sin and where it leads. David's first step toward sin leads to adultery, lying, deceit, murder, and, finally, the death of a son. The link between sin and restoration comes when David admits his sin and Nathan says the Lord has taken it away (2 Samuel 12:13). How much guilt is Bathsheba's isn't clear; however, when God tells them through the prophet Nathan that he loves their son Solomon and wants him to be called Jedidiah, the restoration is Bathsheba's as well as David's. If God could forgive this terrible sin of David, don't you think he could forgive your sin, whatever it may be?

Promises in Scripture

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

—EXODUS 34:6–7

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

—2 CHRONICLES 7:14

*For the sake of your name, O LORD,
forgive my iniquity, though it is great.*

—PSALM 25:11

*For I [God] will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.*

—HEBREWS 8:12

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.... And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own."

—2 SAMUEL 12:7–9

- REFLECT ON: 2 Samuel 12:1–25.
- PRAISE GOD: That he is quick to note our suffering.
- OFFER THANKS: That God calls the powerful to abide by the same moral standards as the weak.
- CONFESS: Any unforgiveness you may have toward another.
- ASK GOD: To restore your confidence and to free you from any tendency to take on the mind-set of a victim.

Lift Your Heart

*I*f you have suffered abuse—whether sexual, physical, or emotional—don't bury your feelings, absorbing the shame and guilt that belong to the abuser. Instead, share your pain with at least one other person—a trusted friend or counselor. Find other women who have endured similar abuse and gone on to lead fruitful and significant lives. Determine that you will not let someone else's sin ruin your life. Learn the skills of a survivor. Even if you've never been abused, you probably know someone who has—a daughter, a friend, or an acquaintance. Do whatever you can to help that person and pray that God will restore her hope.

Father, forgiveness is so hard sometimes. I want justice, not mercy. Please help me to begin the process of forgiveness by letting go of my desire for revenge. Every time I start wishing something negative on those who've hurt me, help me to pray a blessing on their behalf instead. Only you can give me the desire to forgive. Only you can help me do the impossible.