

Uriah: Faith of a Foreigner



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Sam. 26:5–11, 2 Samuel 11, Esther 8:17, Psalm 51, Isa. 56:3–7, Eph. 2:19.*

Memory Text: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (*Deuteronomy 6:5, NIV*).

Imagine that you are buying a train ticket. You stand in line for a long time and worry about missing your train. Finally you pay, receive your ticket, and run to the train. On the way, you count your change and discover that you have been given far too much. What do you do? Stand in line again to return the money and perhaps miss your train, or simply consider this your lucky day and move on?

What you do in this situation will depend on your understanding of right and wrong. Ethics is the way that we apply this understanding in our everyday lives. Nowadays the most popular type of ethics is situation ethics, which suggests that there are no moral absolutes. It often means doing whatever is most beneficial for oneself in a particular situation.

This week we'll see a powerful contrast of ethics between those of King David and of the soldier Uriah. However horrible David's actions are, they appear even worse contrasted with those of Uriah. Though we aren't told much about Uriah, what we discover of him and his unfortunate fate can teach us what it means to live out one's faith as opposed to just talking about it.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 6.*

The Slippery Slope

Read 2 Samuel 11 and ask yourself, **How could someone so honored of God stoop so deep into sin? What warning should this present to all of us?**

We cannot study the story of Uriah without looking at David. In David's association with Uriah, we can see David at his worst. The author of Samuel does not sing the hero's praises while ignoring his sins. The story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah marks a turning point in the life and reign of David. Up to this point, David is portrayed as someone going from strength to strength. Second Samuel 11, however, depicts the beginning of David's downfall.

Some may want to see in David's sin an excuse for their own. However, the narrator emphasizes that sin has consequences and shows how many lives one particular sin affected. The first to suffer as a result of David's sin is Uriah, followed by the child born to David and Bathsheba. David loses credibility in his family, and the repercussions spread from a family problem to a problem of national proportions. The chain reaction that David's sin has set in motion widens to include rape (2 Sam. 13:14), murder (vss. 28, 29), and many lives lost in a rebellion (2 Samuel 15). Even if repentance gains God's mercy, the author of the book of Samuel clearly points out to us that sin has grave consequences (2 Sam. 12:13, 14).

The story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah is told in a carefully structured way. The biblical author uses action words (often involving the verb *to send*) in order to contrast Uriah's and David's behavior. Let's have a look at the structure of the story, based on the main action.

- David sends Joab to fight the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:1).
- David inquires about and sends for Bathsheba (vss. 3, 4).
- David commits adultery with Bathsheba (vs. 4).
- Bathsheba sends a message about her pregnancy (vs. 5).
- David sends for Uriah (vs. 6).
- Uriah refuses to sleep with Bathsheba (vs. 13).
- David sends the death warrant with Uriah (vss. 14, 15).

As can be easily seen, "sending" is a very important activity in 2 Samuel 11. When we send someone around, we normally have power over that person. Looked at from this angle, David is truly the most powerful character in our story. He does most of the sending. He controls the members of the cast. He shapes and destroys their lives. He looks like a typical ancient Near Eastern absolute monarch of his time. However, there is one thing that David does not control: sin. Although he seems to control the outward action, sin controls his choices and motivations.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Samuel 11:11*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Compare and contrast Uriah the Hittite's fidelity to God and to his country with King David's collapse of morality.

Feel: Sense our vulnerability to fall into temptation without the constant presence of God's grace.

Do: Throw ourselves daily on God's mercy and saving power.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Faith and Faithlessness

A In the face of Uriah's integrity, David fell deeper and deeper into sin as he tried to cover his wrongdoing with Bathsheba. What evidence of Uriah's faithfulness to God do we have?

B How did David come to such a state of unprincipled action?

C What were the end results of Uriah's faithfulness? What were the long-term results of David's sin?

II. Feel: But for the Grace of God

A If David, a man after God's own heart, could fall into such sin, how vulnerable are we to temptation?

B What was David's response when God confronted him with his sin? What is our only hope?

III. Do: Daily Surrender

A Though David sinned, he recognized God's power to forgive and cleanse, and he threw himself entirely on God's mercy. How can we make David's prayer our own?

► **Summary:** Uriah's whole focus was his duty to God. All the persuasive power of a mighty king couldn't move him to violate his conscience, and because of it, David had him killed. David had lost his integrity and committed great sins. Yet, in humility and repentance, he sought God's forgiveness, and God saved him.

No One Is an Island

The entire story of David and Uriah is set against the backdrop of a war with the Ammonites. Read 2 Samuel 11:1 carefully. What subtle criticism of David does the author include?

David decides to stay home and sends out his army under Joab. This was, of course, David's first mistake. He had somehow begun to believe that he really was more special than his men and was, therefore, not to put himself in danger. David had not learned yet that the greatest dangers are almost always from within, not from without. The great problem with power or authority is the way it easily leads us to distort our own self-perception. We think that we are somehow better than others and above the laws or rules that hold for others.

Compare the forms of leadership that David exercises in the story of 1 Samuel 26:5–11 and in 2 Samuel 11. What difference do you see?

In the stories describing how David spared Saul's life, David leads by example and asks for volunteers. But now, in the time of 2 Samuel 11, instead of being out with his troops and leading them, and depending on God for guidance and personal safety, David finds himself on a hot, humid evening up on the flat roof of his palace (in order, perhaps, to catch the evening breeze). The palace, probably built on the highest section of the fortress city, has a commanding view of most of Jerusalem. David scans the rooftops and sees a woman bathing. Then he sends someone to find out the identity of the woman. He sends for the woman, knowing full well that she is the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. The Hebrew verb that is used to indicate David's command to Bathsheba is very strong. In other contexts it is used to indicate that something is taken by force (*Gen. 14:11*). David follows his desires and, while the hormones are pumping, he completely brackets out what he knows about right and wrong. Little does David imagine, in that moment, the far-reaching effects that will follow from this personal decision he makes. By deliberately flaunting his power, he will directly affect the lives of Bathsheba, Uriah, an unborn child, and the course of Israel's history.

Think about the decisions you make. Are they based mostly on reason, rational thinking, and logic, or are they based on emotion and passion? Which way of thinking seems to dominate you? Is there a right balance between these motives, and if not, how can you find it?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Like Uriah, we should march toward obtaining a holy character to match the holy cause we are fighting for.

Just for Teachers: Without becoming a “David story,” a telescoping study of Uriah offers a rich abundance of material. Allow Uriah “his moment” by spotlighting his rock solid, *upward* components of character that may shine light toward an understanding of our own.

Of the Hittite tribe, Uriah was a native of Canaan, which had been invaded by Israel, and yet he ended up fighting side by side with the Jewish infantry in the Israeli-Ammonite war.

Of the Oneida tribe, Chapman Schanandoah was a native of America, which had been invaded by Europeans. Upon allegiance to the American government, he fought side by side with the United States Navy seamen in the Spanish-American War. See www.oneidaindiannation.com.

Of Jacob’s 12 tribes—either naturally or symbolically—we are natives of the fallen world, invaded by hope. Upon adoption (*Rom. 8:14, 15*) we fight side by side with God’s army in the great controversy.

Clearly, Uriah’s story of changed allegiance and subsequent enlistment in the army of the opposition is not unique. Given the similarities in the narratives of the warriors listed, why is Uriah’s story of allegiance to a “turn-it-upside-down” invading government so intriguing? What can we spiritually learn from Uriah?

Consider This: Ponder the foreignness of Uriah. Geographically, he was a native of Canaan and a resident of Israel. Spiritually, he was already adopted by God (*vss. 15, 16*) before his change in citizenship. Was Uriah, then, a foreigner in either sense of the word? Why, accordingly, do we continue to categorize him as an *outsider*?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Using 2 Samuel’s account, guide the class into sketching a character profile of Uriah, particularly the exemplary components that we want to assimilate into our own characters.

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A Foreigner in Israel

Throughout this chapter Uriah is referred to as Uriah the Hittite. So who were the Hittites? The Hittites of Palestine were an ethnic group with an uncertain relationship to Neo-Hittite states to the north. In the Old Testament world, culture, nationality, race, and religion were very much interconnected. For this reason, the Old Testament strongly criticizes and prohibits intermarriage between Israel and the surrounding nations. The prohibition given in Deuteronomy 7:3 is repeated at each major revival in Israel. A key to understanding the prohibitions against intermarriage is religion. The Old Testament is full of examples of foreigners who accept the God of Israel, and the Bible regards their assimilation to Israel positively. In the case of Uriah, the assimilation is in the form of marriage, as well as religion.

What are some examples of foreigners who were assimilated into Israel? *Josh. 6:25, Ruth 1:1–16, Esther 8:17, Isa. 56:3–7.*

Ruth, the Moabitess, left her land, people, and religion and went with her mother-in-law back to Israel. Her famous words underline the important concept of adopting not only another people but also another God: “ ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God’ ” (*Ruth 1:16, NIV*). The assimilation includes not only exemplary daughters-in-law but also lying prostitutes. Remember Rahab, the prostitute who rescued the two spies? Here was someone who responded very positively to the little light she had and chose to believe that the God of Israel was powerful and faithful. Sometime after the fall of Jericho, Rahab marries Salmon and, together with Ruth, is included in the genealogy of Christ (*Josh. 6:25, Matt. 1:5*).

Uriah was not the only Hittite to have served David. First Samuel 26:6 mentions Ahimelech the Hittite. However, Uriah became one of David’s elite warriors (*1 Chron. 11:41*). Interestingly, if Eliam the father of Bathsheba (*2 Sam. 11:3*) was the same Eliam who was the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite (*2 Sam. 23:34*), then Uriah had indeed married into a very influential family. His father-in-law also would have been an elite warrior and son of David’s esteemed counselor. This could explain the proximity of Uriah’s house to the palace, and it may provide a reason for Ahithophel’s later defection to Absalom’s conspiracy. It may well be that he held a grudge against David for the treatment of his granddaughter Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.

Read Ephesians 2:19. How can Ruth’s, Rahab’s, and Uriah’s assimilation into Israel help us to establish our personal spiritual pedigree? How does this passage help us understand that no matter our background, through Christ we can be accepted into “the household of God”?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. “I Will Not Do This Thing”** (Read 2 Samuel 11:11, 1 Samuel 1:26, and 2 Kings 2:2 with your class.)

The ultimate revelation of Uriah’s sterling character is his declaration (2 Sam. 11:11, NKJV): “As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.” Whose conviction does Uriah seem to echo? (See Genesis 39:9.)

Uriah is referring to spending the night with his wife, which—obviously—no commandment forbids. Is loyal compassion for his comrades all that’s going on? Or in addition to the problem of the ark being housed in a tent, is there an even deeper matter here?

Yes! Jewish tradition has it that, as a measure to conserve strength, Israelite soldiers took an oath not to have sexual relations the evening before, or during, battle or while their unit fought. Thus in the words of Angus MacGregor, Uriah “honors his oath of no sex while his unit is in battle” (www.hiddenwood.com).


That Uriah was honoring an oath is evident by his phrase “as you live, and as your soul lives.” It was customary in Israel to swear oaths by the life of the person addressed.

The permanence of keeping a vow was not to be trifled with (*Num. 30:2 and Deut. 23:23*), even if keeping it meant a person suffered loss in order to keep the vow (*Ps. 15:4*). So deeply was Uriah’s oath ingrained in the Lord’s honor and his own that, even in spite of David’s making Uriah drunk (2 Sam. 11:13), Uriah was not swayed to break it! (Note: Some sources infer that Uriah was declaring an oath, not repeating a former one. Whether the oath was invoked on the spot or not, Uriah’s strong conviction was that the oath was necessary and not to be revoked.)

Uriah, indeed, believed that he was fighting for a holy cause. A strong hint that Uriah’s holy character came before the holy cause—rather than the cause serving as a wake-up call to character—is uncovered in the meaning of Uriah’s name chosen by his parents: “my light is the Lord.” What does that imply about the childhood home he grew up in, which could account for his sterling character?

Consider This: Consider the following responses to the question, What temptations might have been going through Uriah’s mind during his dinner with the king?

- “I am married.”

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What's in a Name?

Names were very important in the biblical world. A name told of the person's cultural heritage and beliefs or pointed to the wishes of the parents for the child. Often a change in life circumstances or beliefs was indicated by a change of name.

Note the following biblical characters' new names and mark the reason given for the name change:

Abram (*Gen. 17:5*)

Jacob (*Gen. 32:27, 28*)

Daniel (*Dan. 1:7*)

After Jacob's night of wrestling with the celestial visitor, he experienced perhaps one of the most far-reaching name changes in all sacred history. Out of a "deceiver" (Jacob) became a "may-God-strive-for" (Israel), and all of his descendants became known as "Israelites," or the children of Israel.

In the case of Daniel, the name change had a different purpose. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure that the young exiles knew who was in control. He also wanted to brainwash them somehow. Daniel's name was changed from "God is my Judge" to "protect the life of the prince" (Belteshazzar) in an attempt by the heathen king to undermine Daniel's allegiance to his God.

The name of Bathsheba's husband is not unique in biblical history. During the time of King Hezekiah, a prophet by the name of Uriah communicated God's judgment against Jerusalem (*Jer. 26:20–23*). Interestingly, Uriah's name is Hebrew and could be translated as "my light is the Lord" or "flame of the Lord." While he may have been a Hittite by birth, by choice he belonged to the God of Israel. Uriah's ethnic background underlines the fact that God does not look at the outside but knows the heart. Having family members in prominent church positions or great godly ancestors does not give us a better standing before God. Neither does our family history or even our past personal history affect our acceptance with God.

By dying for all humanity, Christ tore down all barriers between all people (*Gal. 3:28*). The Cross proves us all equal before God; Christ's death was for every human being, for every human being is of infinite value in His eyes. Sure, God has at times given different groups special tasks and callings, but that's not the same as saying some people are of more value to God than others. The Cross proves that point wrong.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- “The king himself told me to go to her.”
- “Sure, I feel bad for the guys on the battlefield, but their situation tonight won’t improve a whit by what I do or don’t do here in Jerusalem tonight.”
- “How would my fellow soldiers ever find out?”
- “And after all, the soldiers don’t really understand the pressures on a captain—how badly we need some creature comforts.”

Nevertheless, Uriah’s bottom line was, “But this is not upright. I would know. The Lord would know.” What would be our response?

II. Uriah Was Brave (Read 2 Samuel 23:39 with your class.)

Uriah was one of King David’s 37 most valiant, honored, military men, one of the king’s own elite bodyguard. To what military force might the 37 be compared?

When Joab put Uriah’s unit right up to the gate of the enemy’s wall, Uriah had to know that in so hopeless a situation death was imminent if he did not flee. Uriah fought to the finish.

Consider This: For what or whom are we willing to fight to the finish, and why?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This activity applies the rungs of the Christian growth ladder in 2 Peter 1:5–7 to this lesson’s Key Concept.

If we are to fight individually for a holy character as did Uriah, why is it not only enlightening but also crucial to evaluate occasionally where we perceive ourselves on the climb?

Can we do this if we are not even familiar with the order of the rungs?

With this thought in mind, prepare a double-sided handout, if supplies are available, with the rungs in random order on side one, perhaps alphabetically, and, on the reverse side, the correct sequence, beginning with faith, at the bottom.

Activity: Ask the class members to rearrange the random list in the order that they, in human insight, would suppose is the ascending order.

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A Man of Principle

In the biblical narrative Bathsheba appears as a passive character, and the biblical author refrains from making any comments about her accountability or involvement. However, even though she appears to be passive in the entire account, she too will pay a high price. Her baby son will die. The only time that Bathsheba speaks is when she sends a message to David to tell him that she is pregnant (2 Sam. 11:5). David figures that if he can get Uriah home for even one evening, then it would appear that the baby was Uriah's, and David's sin would go undetected. And so David sends for Uriah, who has to make a tiring 40-mile (approximately 65-kilometer) trip to Jerusalem. After making some small talk, David sends Uriah home with a veiled command that he go and sleep with his wife (2 Sam. 11:8). In an effort to appear generous, he even sends a gift to Uriah's home, thinking that the situation is all taken care of. However, Uriah, being a man of principle, cannot be manipulated. The next morning David hears that Uriah spent the night in the gate with the servants of the king. The situation is quickly slipping out of David's control. David sends for Uriah. He is becoming frustrated. Uriah is showing him up badly. David, who was once a man of integrity, now cannot seem to understand Uriah's integrity.

What does 2 Samuel 11:10–13 tell us about Uriah's motives? What other examples can we find in the Bible of those who acted with the same kind of integrity?

Uriah's answer shows that he was not a nominal believer but had completely identified himself with the God of Israel and his comrades. Uriah believed that it was wrong to use his situation for personal comfort or advantage. The same David who once showed complete loyalty to King Saul (even though Saul was persecuting him) now cannot understand the loyalty and faithfulness of Uriah.

David resorts to a disgusting scheme. He deliberately gets Uriah drunk in an attempt to break down his principles. It is interesting to note that the same scheme was used by the two daughters of Lot, and it led to the origin of the Ammonites (*Gen. 19:30–38*)—the very people that the Israelite army is fighting. Despite his impaired reasoning, Uriah refuses to compromise his values and again spends the night among the king's servants.

Read Psalm 51 in the context of 2 Samuel 11. What can we learn from it about the nature of sin, of repentance, and of God's grace?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Alternately, make a list of the rungs and scramble the order. Read them to the class, asking it to prioritize the rungs in the order it thinks the rungs must come on the ladder of Christian growth.

Then ask, Does the ascending order of the “real” list come as a surprise? Read Isaiah 55:9 and 1 Samuel 16:7.

The exercise invokes intriguing questions: Are brotherly kindness and love even more difficult than godliness? Why does knowledge come after faith? (Clue: What is the difference between whom we know and what we know, and why does the distinction matter?) At which level comes baptism?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Prepare the following double-sided handout to distribute, with the heading, “My Spiritual Ladder for November 1–5, 2010.” In the column to the left, list the eight ladder rungs, followed by a blank line for notes. Side two comprises the examples below to which they may wish to refer. Alternatively, to do this exercise without the handout, read out loud to your class the eight ladder rungs, also known as the godly graces, encouraging members to think of ways to climb each rung.

Activity: Invite the class members to do the following: for each character component, you might wish to fill out a “goal” for this week that you hope to accomplish.

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| Faith | I will memorize a stellar faith Bible verse. |
| Virtue | I will make right this wrong: _____. |
| Knowledge | I will cover my Bible study guide lesson thoroughly. |
| Temperance | I will limit my food intake to nourishment. |
| Patience | I will finally make that difficult phone call. |
| Godliness | I will study a chapter of Jesus’ life/example. |
| Brotherly kindness | I will send an encouraging e-mail. |
| Charity | I will draw close to _____, who’s hungry for friendship. |

What recognizable “division” of steps is there below and above your spiritual climb? In what ways is that potential division recognizable to others?

Further Study: “The Bible has little to say in praise of men. Little space is given to recounting the virtues of even the best men who have ever lived. This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ. Since they owe all to God the glory of whatever they are or do belongs to Him alone; they are but instruments in His hands. More than this—as all the lessons of Bible history teach—it is a perilous thing to praise or exalt men; for if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall. . . .

“It is impossible for us in our own strength to maintain the conflict; and whatever diverts the mind from God, whatever leads to self-exaltation or to self-dependence, is surely preparing the way for our overthrow. The tenor of the Bible is to inculcate distrust of human power and to encourage trust in divine power.

“It was the spirit of self-confidence and self-exaltation that prepared the way for David’s fall. Flattery and the subtle allurements of power and luxury were not without effect upon him. Intercourse with surrounding nations also exerted an influence for evil. According to the customs prevailing among Eastern rulers, crimes not to be tolerated in subjects were uncondemned in the king; the monarch was not under obligation to exercise the same self-restraint as the subject. All this tended to lessen David’s sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And instead of relying in humility upon the power of Jehovah, he began to trust to his own wisdom and might.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 177.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In your class, have individual members identify roles or positions in which they have or have had power or influence. Discuss what can be done to safeguard against a misuse of power in these positions. How can we help someone who we see is in danger of misusing authority or influence?
- ② Look at the ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic makeup of your Sabbath School class. How welcome would people from other groups or nonchurched people feel in your class? What could you do as a Sabbath School class to reach out to “foreigners”?
- ③ Uriah—honest, loyal, principled—gets murdered by the king he faithfully served. David—dishonest, treacherous, deceitful—gets a beautiful woman as a wife and lives many years. Discuss.
- ④ As a class, go over Psalm 51 and discuss what it teaches about forgiveness. How can we learn to accept forgiveness for ourselves when we might be guilty of sins as bad as David’s?