

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 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 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.

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 not yet had learned 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?

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”?

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.

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?

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?

A New Life

by SEGUNDO GENARO ESCOBAL

I began using drugs when I was a teenager in Peru. Drugs led to stealing, which led to prison. I was released and drafted into the military. Then I moved to Brazil, where I slept on the streets and sold handicrafts to buy drugs.

One day my brother found me chewing coca leaves on the street. We used to do drugs together, but he had changed. “I’ve found Jesus,” he said. “And I want you to meet Him too.” He invited my family and me to live with him and learn about God’s love, but I doubted that God had any use for a drug addict.

He invited me to attend evangelistic meetings, and I agreed to go. My wife went as well. During the meetings I accepted Christ into my life and asked to be baptized. But when the pastor learned of my drug problems, he hesitated to baptize me immediately. I became angry and rebelled against God. I fell even more deeply into sin.

Then David, a man from the church, came to study the Bible with me. But I was drunk when he came, and I refused to see him. David sat down and talked to my children about God. He sang and prayed with them. I heard everything from where I was hiding. Finally David left, but he returned every week without fail. Because of his love, I surrendered my life to Christ.

I prayed for deliverance from drugs, but God didn’t take the cravings away instantly. One day I had to run an errand, yet I knew I was too weak to leave home without buying drugs unless I had God’s help. I prayed until I felt God’s strength fill me. I passed friends who invited me to have a drink or a smoke or some drugs. I hurried by, not daring to stop. After I finished my errand, I caught a bus home. At every bus stop I prayed for strength not to get off the bus and buy drugs. I finally reached home and fell asleep, emotionally exhausted.

When I awoke the next morning, I had no urge to drink or take drugs. I knew that God had answered my prayers.

God changed my life completely. Now instead of searching for drugs, I look for people who need Jesus. I give Bible studies two or three times a week, visit people in the hospital, and do whatever God puts in my path. My wife and children also are active in church outreach. God has turned our lives completely around. We are so happy now, complete in Jesus.

SEGUNDO and his family share their faith in Manaus, Brazil.

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