

# 123—DAVID AND THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

(2 Samuel 10–11)

David had made a gesture of kindness toward the king of the Ammonites, but when David's intent was misinterpreted and his servants were humiliated, war resulted. The Ammonites called upon Syria to assist them in the war, and David sent Joab to lead the army of Israel against the forces of Ammon and Syria. David, however, quite contrary to his usual custom, did not go to the battle but remained at home in Jerusalem.

One night in the heat of the summer, David rose from his bed and walked on the roof of his palace. From his vantage point on the roof, David could see a beautiful woman washing herself. When he inquired concerning the woman, his servants told him her name was Bathsheba, the wife of one of his thirty-seven most valiant and devoted soldiers, Uriah the Hittite.<sup>1</sup>

Though David had many wives of his own, he broke the tenth commandment by coveting Uriah's wife. Messengers were sent to bring Bathsheba to his house. And once she was there, David was overcome by lust and lay with her, then sent her back to her own home.

When a few weeks had passed and Bathsheba discovered she was with child, she sent a messenger to tell David. This was not good news for David, and he began to be concerned—not because he had sinned, but for fear of Bathsheba's husband and for his own reputation. David, realizing something must be done quickly, sent a request to Joab at the war's front, asking that Uriah be sent home to Jerusalem immediately.

When Uriah arrived, David met with him briefly, but David was evasive and talked about many things. He had no intention of telling Uriah what had happened. He asked instead about Joab, the morale of the army, and the progress of the war.

David had a devious plan. He believed that if Uriah got home soon enough, he would think he was the father of Bathsheba's child. So he told Uriah to go home and wash his feet. Then, when Uriah left

him, David sent a gift of food to his house. Uriah, however, did not do as David told him. Instead of going home, he slept at the door of David's house with the servants.

When David learned that Uriah had not gone home, he was frustrated. Seeing that his carefully laid plan was not working, he went to the servants' quarters to talk to Uriah. David spoke as if he had great concern for Uriah. "You have just returned from a long absence," he said. "Why did you not go home to your wife?" David's concern, however, was not for Uriah but for himself.

Uriah's response was evidence of his great loyalty to his king and his fellow soldiers. "The Ark of the Covenant and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents," replied Uriah. "And my lord Joab and his servants are encamped in the open fields. Considering this, would it be proper for me to go into my house to eat and drink and to lie with my wife? As you live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing."

David hid his frustration, but he wanted to try one more time to get Uriah to go home to Bathsheba. "Remain here for one more day," said David, "then you may return to the war." So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem with David's servants all that day and the next.

In the evening of that second day, David called Uriah to eat and drink with him. He gave him too much to drink and made him drunk, but still Uriah did not go home to Bathsheba.

The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab, sealed it, and gave it to Uriah to deliver. David was frustrated and desperate now. He had decided to do to Uriah what King Saul had long ago sought to do to him. His letter to Joab was short and to the point: "Place Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, then retire from him, that he may be smitten and die."

Joab was not totally obedient to what David asked in his letter. He did not put Uriah at the forefront of a heated battle but instead set up an attack against a fortified city of the Ammonites where he knew there would be great danger. And he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew the valiant men would be. When the men of the city came out in response to the attack, they fought against Joab's men, taking many lives—including that of Uriah.

When the battle was done, Joab sent a report back to David. "The men of the city prevailed against us," he wrote. "When they came out into the field, we attacked them and drove them back to the gates of

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<sup>1</sup> David's thirty-seven mighty men are named in both 2 Samuel 23:8–39 and 1 Chronicles 11:10–47. Uriah the Hittite is named in 2 Samuel 23:39 and 1 Chronicles 11:40. Though he was a Hittite, he was obviously a convert to the gospel and the Law of Moses.

their city. But when we were near at the gates, those who shot from the wall caused the death of many of our men. And among the dead was your servant, Uriah the Hittite.”

David was pleased and relieved with the results of the battle and sent a response to Joab. “Do not be discouraged because of your defeat or for the loss of Uriah,” he wrote, pretending to show regret, “for the sword will devour one man as well as another. What

you must do now is make a stronger battle against the city and overthrow it.”

When Bathsheba learned of her husband’s death, she mourned his loss. But when the period of mourning was past, David sent for her. She became David’s wife and bore the son conceived by David’s sin. And that which David had done displeased Jehovah.