

“The Thing David Did”

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Continuing a series *A King for God’s People*

2nd Samuel 11:1-27

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See the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

*Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”
They are corrupt and do evil things.
Not one of them does anything good.*

Psalm 14:1¹

After the winter rains ended, before the harvest began, it was the time for war.² It was time for the warrior king to do what they expected him to do: lead them to battle and give them victory.³ The army mustered. Arrows were fletched, swords sharpened. Strategists planned. Soldiers said good-byes. The army marched.

This time, the king stayed home. Confident, I presume, in his generals to lead and his soldiers to fight, without him. Or maybe lost interest in battles.

What happened this time the king stayed home? You heard. He saw her. He asked about her. He sent for her. He took her.

He took her.

Rulers take. Way back when dear old Samuel told them what kings are like, he warned them: rulers take. Your sons. Your daughters. Your crops. Your livestock. Your work. Your freedom. Rulers take.⁴

The king took Bathsheba.

Lay with her. When finished, he sent her back.

The king was David. Our David. God’s David.

¹ Common English Bible. The Revised Common Lectionary twins Psalm 14 with today’s reading, 2nd Samuel 11.

² V. Philips Long, “1 Samuel” in John H. Walton (ed), Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 457.

³ 1st Samuel 8.19-20.

⁴ 1st Samuel 8.11-18.

II

David took her. Why?

Sex? Desire? . . . Domination?

It's an old story, often told and too often true. Desire mixes with power. Power excuses desire.

We desire. Wild thoughts run through our fields. It might not be sex. There are so many other things that stir us. What power does — we don't need much — power convinces us that we can break and tame and master our wildness. So we let it loose. We think we can ride it. Instead, it runs unbridled, dragging us along. And, honestly, we might like the rampage.

When you have power, people might tell you how wonderful you are. You might believe it (you want to). And you might think, "Why shouldn't I? I deserve it. I'm entitled. I'll grab anything I want. They will let me."⁵ And they might.

David took Bathsheba. Did he ask her? Could she have said "No, your majesty!"

When she got home, was she desperate for another bath? To wash him off?

Then, a month or two. She sends words that tell David he is not as sovereign over everything as he thought: "I'm pregnant."

III

*Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." . . .
The Lord looks down from heaven on humans
to see if anyone is wise, to see if anyone seeks God,
but all of them have turned bad.*

Psalm 14:1a-2

David is king. So David summoned . . . Uriah back from the battle. He brought Uriah back to where a battle was happening the poor guy knew nothing about. David suggested . . . go home, wash up. You know what he means.⁶ If Uriah and Bathsheba share a moment, everyone will assume the child is the soldier's. Bathsheba will know better. Will she dare whisper a word? Shame silences victims; abusers count on that.

Uriah is a Hittite. He is not bound to Israel's Torah, the way of God. Yet he proves himself true to it. More than David! Loyal. Faithful. Full of integrity.⁷ Without even knowing the significance of what he is doing, he thwarts his king's scheme. He will not "go home." Not

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump_and_Billy_Bush_recording

⁶ "Wash your feet" might have been a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Even if it was not, David's intention was clear.

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 275.

when God's army and his comrades are in battle. Uriah the foreigner does what David the king of God's People should have done. He is what God's anointed should have been . . . what we all thought David was.

David summoned. David suggested. And when that failed . . . well, the sure sign of sovereignty is the power to legally kill. David is king, so he sends Uriah back, unknowingly carrying his own death warrant. David is king, so General Joab shifts tactics. He blunders on purpose. Who would send soldiers so close to the enemy wall from where arrows would fly and stones fall? Uriah is not the only one to die in the fiasco. The return of so many heroes in coffins should provoke an outcry from David. Except one contains the corpse of Uriah the Hittite. Mission accomplished.

IV

Notice how many get involved in David's plot. He could never do this alone.

- Those he sends to find out about Bathsheba.
- Those he sends to take her.
- Those who spy on Uriah's activities.
- General Joab.

None, it seems, asks questions. None, as far as we know, mutters objections. *"None of my business. Don't get me involved. Just following orders. He's the king!"*

What about those who will continue the cover-up? Those who will slander Bathsheba? *Why did she go to David? Why didn't she say "No?" What was she wearing? Why was she bathing on the roof?* Those who will jump to their hero's defense? If he says, *"I did not have sexual relations with that woman,"* they will defend him because they need his politics. He is David! Of course we believe him; we don't want to not believe. We need him to be who we think he is.

Look at David! Poor Uriah is dead. Poor Bathsheba, widowed. Poor child, orphaned before his birthday. See what David does! He takes them both in.

He takes in everyone else too. The audience insists that any other version must be fake news.

"Kings will be kings." More honestly, "people will be people." Dare we admit that we, each in our own way, are the problem? We are implicated!

V

David even convinces himself. One remarkable exchange reveals it. David sends this message back to General Joab: *"Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes. The sword devours one as well as another."*

In other words, "War is war. Soldiers die." We might say: "targeting error," "collateral damage," "all for the greater good."

“Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes. More than a twister of words, David appoints himself the judge of morality. He can know between good and evil. He tastes the fruit, and judges himself innocent. And, honestly, why not him? Why should you get to judge David? What standard dare you use? Yours? Ours? Our values? Our culture’s morality? Who, except ourselves, appointed us discerners of good and evil, any more than David?

VI

But then, there is this: *“But the thing David had done was evil to the Lord.”*

For Bathsheba and Uriah, there is this: *“But the thing David had done was evil to the Lord.”*

*Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” . . .
Everyone is corrupt.
No one does good—not even one person!*

Psalm 14:1a,3

Atheists are not simply those who insist God does not exist. Believers can be atheists in the ways that matter most. When we act as if God has nothing to do with anything, as if God does not see, as if God does not hold us to account, we are “acting atheist.”

For the sake of the Bathshebas and Uriahs, this account ends with this insistence: *“But the thing David had done was evil to the Lord.”* Even David does not get to decide good and evil. (Not you, nor me.) David is not the judge. (Nor you, nor me.) Bathsheba and Uriah have their Judge who uncovers and decides, their Vindicator, their Defender who is the Truth.⁸

That’s good news. Even for us Davids.

Because that One is God.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann writes, “By juxtaposing verse 25 and verse 27, the narrator has skillfully shown that royal perceptions of reality are not congruent with Yahweh’s perception (cf. Prov 16:2). The royal seductions of power and security have skewed the moral vision of Israel. The king may act. The king may kill. The king may be self-satisfied. The king, however, is not capable of revising moral reality. The king may imagine he has escaped the hard, non-negotiable reality of the old torah tradition. The king may imagine he is morally autonomous and subject to no one.” Brueggemann, 279.