



King David Between Power and Adultery: Jewish Perspectives on David and Bathsheba's Relationship

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Abstract

David and Bathsheba's biblical tale is both dramatic and ambiguous: A strong man spots a stunning stranger and tells his men to call her. She conceives a child. The man makes a feeble attempt to hide it, but in the end, he kills the woman's husband, and they subsequently get married. Recent days have seen frenzied internet debates among evangelicals on an issue pertaining to this old story: Did David have an affair with Bathsheba, or did he rape her? The solution has effects on a biblical hero's reputation as well as how youngsters are taught the well-known narrative. However, the discussion itself sheds light on—and may even alter—the perspectives held by evangelical Christians on gender, sex, power, consent, and abuse. Like the Bible, the midrashim regarding Bathsheba and her son King Solomon and her husband King David place her in a supporting role. She is never punished for her connection with David, even though her emotions and feelings are never discussed; this suggests that the rabbis thought of her as a virtuous, guiltless woman. The rabbis highlight that God approved of David's marriage to Bathsheba and pardoned David for his transgression against Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. The rabbis present Bathsheba as Solomon's mentor during his lifetime, correcting him when he deviated from morality. This article is a contribution to biblical studies on a Jewish Perspective. The study sheds light on the debate about David having an affair with, or raping Bathsheba. This places David's narrative between the discussion of power and adultery.

Keywords: King David, Bathsheba, power, adultery, Old Testament.



Introduction

The Old Testament's second book of Samuel (2 Samuel 11:1-24) contains the tale of King David and Bathsheba, the soldier's wife. David first watches Bathsheba bathing, then goes to great efforts to trick her noble husband, finally sending the poor man to the front lines of an ongoing battle. Bathsheba gives birth to the future King Solomon after her marriage to David. The core line presents the incident as an ominous turning point in the life of the biblical patriarch, concluding with the statement that "the act David had done grieved the Lord." However, the language is unclear as to what was so offensive, let alone what it ought to be termed.

The *Tosefta* (an assemblage information collected from other sources of Jewish oral law from the late 2nd century CE), shows that one of the portions that is not recited during the public readings from the Torah and the Prophets (*haftarot*), nor are they translated into the vernacular [i.e., Aramaic] before the public, is the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba's transgression. Despite this, the instructor is permitted to recite these passages in the way in which he typically teaches portions of Scripture (Megillah, 3:38). The *Tosefta* seems to believe that there is value in telling the narrative, from which we might learn something, but he believes that it is inappropriate to share it in public; rather, it should be studied in the more private setting of a teacher's teachings to his students (Kadari, 1999).

Although Bathsheba is a minor character, King David undoubtedly isn't, and Bathsheba plays a crucial part in David's tale. David is undoubtedly "the main person in Israel's narrative," and Bathsheba makes her debut barely four chapters after the majestic Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7. Walter Brueggemann did not exaggerate when he called David "the dominant figure in Israel's narrative." In several respects, Bathsheba stands in contrast to David; she is relatively helpless while he is at his most powerful, and she uses her position of influence to support her son's ascension to the kingdom when David is frail and on the verge of death (Koenig, 2018: 2).

David is supremely emblematic of "the dissonance between the religion of the Rabbis and the Book from which it is supposed to be derived," the driving force behind Midrashic exegesis. The biblical text virtually disappears before the rabbinic position that holds all those who claim David sinned to be in error *כל האומר דוד חטא אינו אלא טועה* the prophet Nathan's lengthy angry tirade against David in God's name, unequivocally condemning him for violating another man's wife, renders a view of a sinless David untenable. Piper is saying that the narrative of David's transgressions told by the prophet Nathan is likewise instructive (Diamond, 2007; Kadari 1999). In the narrative, Nathan describes a rich guy who had several flocks and herds and who resided close to a poor man who had just one lamb. The beggar had a childlike affection for his lamb. However, when the wealthy man had a visitor, he took the lamb from his underprivileged neighbor, slaughtered it, and fed it to the visitor instead of providing food from his own flocks or herds. In the areas of theft and murder, [Nathan] genuinely recreated adultery. "The small, little, innocent pet lamb being slain and offered up as a meal is sort of Bathsheba's killing, not Uriah's killing—and that's extra evil, Piper said. In the areas of theft and murder, [Nathan] genuinely recreated adultery. "The small, little, innocent pet lamb being slain and offered up as a meal is sort of Bathsheba's killing, not Uriah's killing—and that's extra evil, Piper said. We are not exaggerating when we refer to David's misuse of his authority in the satisfaction of his sinful passion in the way he took Bathsheba because of these two factors, in my opinion (Chamberlain, 2022; Weigle & Allen, 2017).

Interpretations of Bathsheba's personality are numerous and diverse. She's been interpreted in a number of different ways, such as an innocent victim, survivor who seizes the opportunity, or cunning schemer (Davidson, 2006; Létourneau, 2018; Gravett, 2004). Her



innocence has been defended with several strong grounds. The grammar of 2 Samuel 11:4 really indicates a non-consensual sexual offense, or what we would refer to as "rape", which is something that no one has noticed, and I intend to contribute to that observation. This interpretation is supported by the surrounding context, early translations, and rabbinic sources.

The narrator solely describes what David did: dispatched, took, brought her, and laid with her. Regarding Bathsheba's responses, the author says nothing. Was she awestruck or flattered? Did she find David's popularity and influence alluring or terrifying? Bathsheba had no legal authority to agree to have sex with David under Israelite law. She was a married lady, and adultery would bring humiliation to her, to her family, and endanger her life because adultery was punishable by death (Leviticus 20:10). A woman's honor in Israel was determined by her excellent reputation, which also included her virginity. The treatment Bathsheba received at the hands of David ruined her honor as a woman.

The biblical text says nothing about Bathsheba's perspective on the relationship. She says nothing during the entire incident. She only spoke to David to inform him of her pregnancy. She could have been forced to enter the palace. Going to the royal palace may have been a protest and an objection on her part. On the other hand, she may have been compelled to appear before David out of fear for her life. Caspi, and Cohen write, "Rabbinic literature attempts to explain and solve some of David's issues and his relationship with Bathsheba and Abishag, since in their minds he was the rightful and chosen founder of the royal house. There is no way for them to portray him, the King, the Psalmist, and the source of the future Messiah as evil, human, and weak" (Caspi & Cohen, 1999: 54).

Another option to defend David, is to claim that Bathsheba persuaded him to have sex with her by taking a naked bath on her home's rooftop. One strategy to hold Bathsheba accountable is to claim that she wanted a child with David for her son to inherit the throne. Gale Yee references R. C. Bailey in her essay on Bathsheba who said that Bathsheba was "a co-conspirator in a political conspiracy to marry" David. She "is no longer an innocent victim but a willing participant in the affair who intends her own son to become king," according to the author. She is persuaded to wed David by his assurances that her son would succeed him as king (Yee, 1992:627).

Discussion

The Leader and Sexual Harassment

Bathsheba is not the center of attention; rather, David is and he gets out of bed, wanders around, sees, sends, and inquires. Bathsheba was nothing more than the eroticized object of his lust and sexual fantasies. David had no idea who this lovely lady was, implying that they had never met. She is identified in the text. Bathsheba had a name and was a real person. If Eliam is the same person named in 2 Samuel 23:34, she was his daughter. Eliam was a famous fighter in David's team known as "the Thirty" and the son of David's trusted advisor Ahitophel (2 Samuel 16:23). She was married to Uriah, who was gone fighting for David. David is not deterred by any of this information. He didn't care about her as a person; she was just another lovely object to possess, another victory for him. David was overjoyed to accept God's gift of the kingdom of Israel. As king, he can take whatever he wants, including another man's wife. He stared down on her from his rooftop vantage point above her, as well as from his position of authority over her.

According to Kaplan, the countenance of a powerful man matters and men don't just stare; they also possess the power of action and possession that women's gazes lack. "Women can catch and return glances, but they can't respond to them" (Kaplan, 1983: 31). Bathsheba



was unable to see David's first impression. She had no idea that David was trying to get her. She was helpless and didn't realize that a strong man was in possession of her. She wasn't someone with her name, her family, or her own life; she was merely a spark to fan the flames of his devotion (Cohen, 1965: 142–148; Grey, 2021). David ruled as monarch. As her husband fought in the war of David, he was responsible for the welfare of his people, and perhaps for Bathsheba in particular. Was David's lustrous look a coincidence? Did he happen to be on the roof while she was cleaning? Or was he, so to speak, vandalizing the rooftop for sexual conquest? The text doesn't tell us. But the consequences of his gaze are obvious and devastating. The appearance led to desire. Desire for intention; intent to pursue; and pursuit of action (Garland, 2006: 419-447; Bodi, 2010). Bathsheba was the victim of an authority who abused his power, the leader of his people-like sexual harassment by today's employers and sexual abuse by clergy (Garland, 2006; Ademiluka, 2021).

Nicol (1988) argue that the word וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו “she came to him” interrupts the frenzy through 5 verbal clauses, indicating that she changed into a inclined participant. Others think that it clearly shows her subordinate reputation, because the identical phrases are used of Uriah, who “got here to him” after being despatched for in eleven. Her obedience therefore does now not characterize compliance. It is also crucial to be aware that the word וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו “she came to him” is a textual variation, and the Septuagint omits it. this can be because the word is not original to the text, or it may were unnoticed to emphasize that it turned into not consensual (Garsiel, 1993: 244-262).

David's Acts and His Love for Bathsheba

To keep things brief, we'll concentrate on his actions of king David and his romance with Bathsheba in order to keep things succinct. The fascinating biblical tale focuses on David's humanity. "Anyone who believes King David 'sinned' is just mistaken," says Rabbi Judah HaNasi (BT Shabbat 56a). Winkler (1998) admits where the Talmudic viewpoint is illogical. In spite of having sex with a married woman, David orders his general to leave Bathsheba's husband Uriah exposed and unprotected in the middle of a bloody conflict. According to Talmudic interpretation, Uriah granted his wife a religious divorce (also known as a "get") before departing for the fight. As a result, Bathsheba was not truly "married," but rather "halachically" divorced (Samuel, 2012; Ademiluka, 2021).

The popularity of studying the Babylonian Talmud is unchanged. Rabbanu Tam, a 12th century French Talmudist (and Rashi's grandson), states that the study of the Babylonian Talmud is now the primary area of study. Scholars in the early generations spent one-third of their time studying the Scriptures. Contrary to the widely held belief that David sinned with Bathsheba, this perspective says that David was innocent and that anybody who asserts that he did so is mistaken. According to the Talmud, David was defended by Rabbi Judah the Prince, a descendant of the Davidic line. He asserted that when the prophet Nathan scolded David, asking him (in II Samuel 12:9), "Why then have you disobeyed the Lord's order and done what grieves Him?," he was referring to David's actions. he was criticizing him for an act he intended to do but refrained from doing. David may have had the intention to transgress, but his acts did not go beyond what was permitted by the law (Kadari, 1999).

Winkler wonders how, in view of the Talmud's statement that: "With this categorical announcement, our sages set forth a challenge to all orthodox biblical academics and students, we can understand the account of David and Bat-Sheva as it is discovered and suggested in the text. Despite numerous references to David's wrongdoing in the text, did he not commit any sin at all? What message were the great rabbis of old giving to the next generation?" (Winkler, 2011: 108). This is undoubtedly not the David who is so devoted to his friends and his nation, the David who is so moral and God-sensitive. After pointing out the text's clear and simpler meaning, Winkler makes a confession. David did not commit



adultery since it was common practice under the Davidic line's kingdom for a man to grant his wife a conditional writ of divorce. In accordance with this agreement, if the husband were to die in battle, his wife would be divorced retroactively as of the day he left for the front lines. This custom was instituted to keep women from becoming *agunot* (chained women who are forbidden to remarry). In those days, it was normal for married men to divorce their spouses before going to war so that, if they were "lost" in action, their wives may remarry (Isaacs, 1948). As a result, Uriah had gotten a divorce from his wife. Bathsheba was not married when David had sex with her since Uriah had prepared a writ of divorce for her and was murdered during the conflict. She was not yet married; hence this act of sexual activity was an act of matrimony (Koenig, 2018).

Winkler explores several solutions for the exegetical issue he raises. One view holds that the Talmudic word should not be taken literally but should be considered more of a "Midrashic" homily. This view states that David's acts are simply "beyond our comprehension." While naive yeshiva students may be pleased with this kind of attitude, folks who are grounded in reality are not. Thankfully, Winkler turns down this unscrupulous ploy. Everyone is aware that King David had a penchant for gorgeous women. David was about to have an extramarital relationship with Abigail until her husband unexpectedly passed away. After Nabal dies, David immediately asks Abigail to marry him (cf. 1 Samuel 25:40-42).

Winkler surprisingly claims that David did not engage in adultery because, if he had, he would have received the death penalty. Nevertheless, he has committed a "moral infraction" (McGeough, 2018). David did nothing "wrong" by the standards of a Gentile monarch, but God demands more of His anointed. Winkler's archaeological experience may have aided him on his final argument. In the ancient world, adultery was not regarded acceptable behavior by any Semitic monarch! Adultery is referred to as *הַטָּאָה הַגְּדוֹלָה* "the great sin" by the Philistine King Abimelech in Genesis 20:9. When Joseph tries to persuade Potiphar to leave, he warns her that adultery is *הַרְעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה* "great evil." Even by the standards of Gentile Kings, adultery is clearly a sin. It is hard to reconcile a straightforward interpretation of the passage with Torah law, even without the Talmud's warning. Even after a divorce or the passing of her spouse, a woman who has engaged in adultery is not permitted by Jewish law to remarry the man (Winkler, 1998). Any offspring from such a coupling would be considered a mamzer, or illegitimate, and as such would be ineligible for both kingship and marriage into the larger society of accepted Jewish women. We are forced to draw the conclusion that David, whatever his guilt may have been with Bathsheba, did not commit adultery since he chose to stay married to her after the occurrence without being censured and because their son, Solomon, was permitted to govern and continue the messianic line (Goldson, 2010; Ibnzahav, 1951).

The scorn for adultery in ancient Israel is congruent with the societal sentiments of Israel's neighbors. Adultery, for example, is referred to as a "grave crime" in documents discovered in Ugarit and Egypt. Adultery was viewed by the ancients as a transgression against the gods rather than a crime against a life partner. Because the family is the cornerstone of society, protecting the integrity of the family unit was essential (Rumimpunu et al, 2020). Although Winkler's statements may more accurately describe the despicable actions of Roman emperors, I believe the Semitic kings of the ancient Near East had much higher moral standards.

Winkler's proofs are intriguing yet contentious. (1) The prophet Nathan never demands an explanation from David for his adultery. He accuses David of organizing Uriah's death instead. (2) When David confesses his sin and repents, he carefully says, "I have sinned to God," meaning that he did not commit the sin against Bat Sheva. As more evidence, Winkler quotes the verse, "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is wrong in your



sight. The third verse from the Bible that Winkler cites is 1 Kings 15:5, where the biblical narrator briefly mentions "the difficulties of Uriah the Hittite" before forgetting about it.

Halpern (2003) refers to 'complimentary causation' and argues that God must intervene because of David's sin in the Bathsheba incident by analyzing practically all the significant events in the biblical text from this point on and up to Solomon's accession to power. However, Yahweh's purposes are ultimately achieved through a combination of human actors behaving naturally in response to the situations they are placed in. The conclusion is that the concerned personalities' autonomy is somewhat at risk. This relates to the Original Sin (Adam and Eve's trespass) in the Genesis 2–3 chapter about the Garden of Eden. It is analogous to the *felix culpa* notion. The first human pair would not have been expelled from Eden, that is, from God's presence, had they not disobeyed divine prohibition and eaten the fruit of knowledge (Tumanov, 2009: 499-509; Barrick, 2020).

Another reason, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 107a) argues that one of the reasons God tested David was because David deliberately requested it (Psalms 26:2). David sought to demonstrate his devotion for God and his ability to rival the Patriarchs. The Talmud draws the conclusion that we should never implore God to put us to the test so that we can demonstrate our worth. God is aware of the ideal moments for tests (Adelman, 2014).

The Scriptures make clear every terrible detail of his illicit affair, so how could David say, "I have sinned to the LORD," if he had not "sinned"? As the scripture states, "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is bad in your sight... ", why did he make an effort to repent in the most fitting way? (Psalms 51:5)? On this point, I am unable to and will not disagree with the Scriptures on this matter! The fact that King David tells Uriah, "You have just returned from a journey," refutes Rebbe's assertion that he offered religious divorces to all of his warriors "in the case they died in combat." Why didn't you visit your home down here? (2 Samuel 11:10). I would prefer to assert that King David actually sinned, that he sincerely repented, and that he through great suffering before achieving atonement (Lowery, 2003).

The Talmud states that it was customary for Jewish warriors to divorce their spouses before to entering combat out of fear that they might perish in battle and prevent their women from ever being able to remarry. Throughout Jewish history, up to World War II, this was the custom. Therefore, King David did not technically commit adultery (Rosenfeld, 2016). He took a single woman with him. Later, when Nathan the Prophet came to condemn David, he compared David's transgression to stealing, using the parable of the rich man who steals the poor man's one tiny lamb as an example. David's fault was taking something he shouldn't have, not really committing adultery, may God forbid. There weren't many girls available for the taking in Bathsheba. Naturally, if Uriah had come home, she would have remarried. And because of this, God was quite critical of David. Such a deed, for a man of his greatness, was pure adultery. And the Torah, in its customary dramatic tone, paints a picture of David's wrongdoing that we would have taken literally had our Oral Torah not clarified the situation for us (Rosenfeld, 2016).

David's Misuse of Power and Reputation

David's role as a shepherd was to safeguard God's sheep, not to mistreat them. The entire purpose of Nathan the Prophet's pastoral account to King David is to make this point (2 Samuel 12:1-6). Since David had the possibility to be saved, Nathan did not need to explain every transgression David had done in his respectful approach to the King. The significance of Abarbanel's comment is that it implies that he wants the reader to be entirely truthful with the material. Along with Abarbanel's wording, a fascinating Mishnah on moral responsibility exists. "If someone throws out fire into the hands of a dumb [person], a deaf-mute, or a child,



they are not subject to the laws of man, but they are subject to the laws of Heaven" (Kamma, 6: 5) (see also Hain, 2020: 2; McGeough, 2018).

It is surprising that David's plot to assassinate Uria was never brought up during the Talmud debate. I have a suspicion that the Rabbi was afraid of offending King David and Rabbi Judah Hanashi. If anything, Uria's tale shows that even after ordering someone to execute a terrible act, a person can still be held accountable. Sure, this has altered the rabbi's viewpoint, but what else is a post-modernist supposed to do? In the end, all people are accountable to God for their acts. The text clearly demonstrates that the monarch is ethically responsible if he hires someone to sow confusion on his behalf, even though this concept does not apply to irresponsible people in the case of the king. King David and King Ahab, in contrast, offer interesting research. Ahab is anxious for the "Navos Vineyard". Evil Isabel uses a trick to kill Navos to "curse God and the King," the poor Navos is killed, and his vineyard is confiscated (1 Kings 21: 5-16). At first, Ahab's actions seem more forgiving, as Jezebel was unaware of his plans to drive Navos away. But when he silently goes to the execution of Navos, everything changes! Elijah boldly declares, "You should tell to him, Thus says the Lord: Have you killed, and seized possession?" in response to Ahab's (and Jezebel's) actions. "Thus says the Lord: Dogs will suck up your blood as dogs licked up the blood of Naboth," you must tell him (1 Kings. 21:5-16). Like Saul, Naboth shows no remorse for his acts.

With the exception of his infidelity with his wife, which led to Uria's death in battle, 1 Kings 15:5 already emphasizes that David was entirely innocent. The parable of the prophet Nathan and David's confession of wrongdoing come after the account of David's deed in 2 Samuel 11 which Nathan was informed by David that he had transgressed the Lord. The Lord has pardoned your wrongdoing; you will not perish, Nathan informed David (2 Samuel 12:13). Instead, the son from the adulterous connection will perish because of the penalty.

Christian authors in the first five centuries C.E. regularly referenced the biblical tale of David's transgression and God's pardon (Hezser, 2021). The focus on David's request for God's mercy is included in 1 Clement, a letter sent to Christians in Corinth by a Roman Christian leader around the end of the first or beginning of the second century C.E. and is comparable to the rabbinic passage in *Sifre Deuteronomy* (1 Clem 18:1 -3).

David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King: Suspicions Extend Even to Absalom's Rebellion is the title of a book by Baruch Halpern. He speculates that David could have sparked Absalom's uprising to increase his hold over the northern tribes. Furthermore, David's repentance is so complete that the only offense of which he is charged was made up. The Bathsheba narrative aims to prove that David, and not Uria, is Solomon's biological father. Halpern speculates that Bathsheba herself may have inspired the story. Halpern says that his work would recreate David from the perspective of his adversaries (Halpern, 2003; Bosworth, 2006).

David's confession to God is not limited to his explicit admissions of sin. If his error was the erasure of Uria's legacy, he should do everything he can to remind people that Uria was a skilled commander who was treated unfairly by the king. He seems to go beyond merely admitting guilt by acting to repair it. David would find it difficult to make such a confession since it would damage his reputation while enhancing Uria's, yet it would be required if the fault was to be addressed. Rabbinic tradition does, however, imply that the prophets were free to write genuine stories without being constrained by royal censorship. However, we shouldn't assume this. Instead, this defense of the prophetic/scribal "estate" should be viewed as a significant accomplishment and a magnificent realization of the monarchy described in Deuteronomy (Lumingkewas, et al., 2022).



More precisely, it is possible to see the publication of this narrative as a potent act of *yibbum*. Why does our text claim that David had an extramarital affair with Bathsheba? After all, it appears that this information was not well known in David's court. How do we know that Uriah was a heroic warrior who suffered injustice? It appears that David gave his permission for this tale to be told in response to both inquiries (Bassali, 2012). Thus, if our assumptions regarding the publication process are accurate, David would have taken extraordinary measures to remedy both his overall gross misuse of power and his inability to continue Uriah's legacy. He would have promoted Uriah's reputation and publicized his misuse of power by telling this tale, one that would eternally tarnish his own legacy (1 Kings 15:5), so that it would endure for all time as a warning to all future kings and leaders (Ludwig & Longenecker, 1993; Firth, 2008).

Conclusion

From the discussion above it shows that David was a successful leader with God's inclusion. This successful leadership was shown by David with many victories in wars against the nations around Israel. David's leadership and obedience to God can be an example of the life of God's people. In the success of his leadership, 2 Samuel 11:1-27 tells that David had two deeds in his life that caused him to fall into evil sins in the eyes of God. First, he had wanted and had sexual intercourse with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. Second, David planned to kill Uriah to protect his honor and cover up his shame.

On the other hand, the Talmud recalls the oral tradition that "Anyone who argues that David sinned is in mistake," in order to caution us from reading too much into David's event with Bathsheba. Despite his failure, David instantly accepted responsibility for his conduct when the prophet pointed out his wrongdoing, saying, "*Chotosi La Shem*—I have sinned against God" (2 Samuel 12:13). David had committed offenses against God when he failed to follow the divine will by twisting the law's original design, although being free of the human sins of adultery and murder. David becomes a timeless allegory for the effectiveness of confession. David shows all future generations through genuine repentance, that anybody may achieve redemption regardless of how serious their transgressions, provided they really regret their wrongdoing and dedicate themselves with all their heart and soul to making amends. Biblical study has a tradition of presenting seemingly incongruous facts that makes us consider the deeds of remarkable individuals in the context of their eras and environments.

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