

Men and Women in Godless Times

Why was God missing in the David & Bathsheba story?

godless times study #4: Second Samuel 11:1-27

essential facts

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then tried to deceive her husband, Uriah, about her pregnancy, God is never directly mentioned (2 Sam. 11:1-13). Nor is the Lord mentioned when David had Uriah killed to order to marry her (11:14-26). Only at the very end of the chapter, in the final verse (11:27), does God appear. Why is this?

possible explanations

Which of the following points do you think are valid or important?

God is not mentioned because he was testing David.

God is not mentioned in order to stress human responsibility.

God is not mentioned in order to teach us about temptation and sin.

God is not mentioned because he did not care what happened to Uriah.

God is not mentioned because of the greatness of the sin in the chapter.

God is not mentioned directly, but 11:11 shows that Uriah was thinking about God.

God is not directly mentioned because to do so might have associated Him with evil.

God is not mentioned directly, but he revealed himself through Bathsheba's conception.

God is not mentioned because David, Bathsheba, and Joab were not thinking about God.

God is not mentioned in most of chapter 11 because he revealed himself later in chapter 12.

4. David seemed to get away with adultery & murder, but...

godless actions
don't go unnoticed.

Second Samuel 11:1–26 covers the nine months period from when David committed adultery with Bathsheba until their 'love child' was born. Yet the Lord is never mentioned in these 26 dark verses. This is one of the longest 'godless periods' found in the Bible. Why was God silent for so long?

David's sin with Bathsheba...

Mark the lines (as completed) below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() was not allowed to remain hidden.
A-1	() was done in secret at night (11:2–4, 12:12).
A-2	() resulted in pregnancy and childbirth (11:4–5, 27).
A-3	() might not have been known if Bathsheba had not conceived.
A-4	() might not have been known if Uriah had gone home as expected (11:8–9, 13).
A-5	() might not have been known if Bathsheba had been able to have a quick abortion.
B	() led to additional sins and sorrows.
B-1	() led to the murder of Uriah (11:14–17, 12:9).
B-2	() led to the birth and death of their son (11:27, 12:14–23).
B-3	() led to Absalom's revolt against David (12:12, 15:13, 16:21–22).
B-4	() led to the rape of Tamar and the death of Amnon (12:10, 13:1–33).
C	() was not directly confronted for a long time.
C-1	() was concentual (11:4).
C-2	() was not confronted at all in chapter 11.
C-3	() was not confronted until about nine months later.
C-4	() was not confronted quickly because Nathan feared David (12:1–7).
C-5	() was confronted after their child was born because that was the opportune time.
D	() became a big scandal.
D-1	() is better known than Lot's daughters' sexual sins (Gen. 19:30–38).
D-2	() was like the scandalous behavior of the man in 1 Cor. 5:1–13.
D-3	() is not found in Chronicles (2 Sam. 12:26, 2 Chr. 20:1–3).
D-4	() became the biggest scandal in the Bible (12:14).
D-5	() is acknowledged indirectly in Mat. 1:6.
D-6	() became a big warning for us all.

Three of the lines above (C-4, C-5, and D-6) deal with why David was not immediately confronted by the Lord. For more about this and happiness in godless times, see the discussion on the next two pages.

The following discussion was overheard at a ladies' Bible study. Those present were discussing many of the points on the David & Bathsheba worksheet on the previous page.

discussion leader (wondering why God did not quickly confront the sinful pair)

Most of us are very familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba and their first child who died. Even so, today's worksheet is an eyeopener, since it points out that God did not openly confront the sinful pair until nine months after their original sin (11:27). I wonder why.

law clerk (on Bathsheba's pregnancy NOT being a blessing)

As a married woman who tried to get pregnant without success for a long time, it pains me to read that Bathsheba immediately became pregnant by David who was not her husband. No wonder, God is not mentioned at first, since her conception was not a blessing from Him. In fact, I believe that it was part of God's plan to expose their sin (A-3). They didn't get away with it (A).

nurse (on the causes of the baby's ill health)

It sounds like the baby had no health problems at birth but became ill soon after because the Lord struck him (12:15). If it were not for the verse on this, I would have associated the infant's death with all the stress that his mother must have experienced during her pregnancy (B-2).

counselor (on the nature of Bathsheba's mourning)

Bathsheba's mourning for Uriah (11:26-27) may not have been just a show. She knew why he had been killed (11:6-24), and the analogy of the poor man's lamb that Nathan used implies that Uriah truly loved her (12:3). The stress involved in the death of a beloved spouse is huge, especially if the living partner is somehow responsible for the death. Repentance and confession were desperately needed. So God sent them a counselor, Nathan the prophet (12:1).

discussion leader (still wondering why Nathan was not sent earlier)

Good comments, and you have correctly pointed out that God was at work in chapter 11 even though he is not directly mentioned (C-2). Yet, God could have sent Nathan earlier. Why didn't he?

home-schooling mother (on God creating a special teachable moment)

We don't know, but for sure it was not because Nathan was afraid of David (C-4), because he was not. I believe that through the poor child that died God created a special teachable moment to confront the guilty pair (C-5). The baby was innocent, of course, but their sin caused his death.

law clerk (on the nature of David and Bathsheba's guilt)

Did anyone notice that God is also never mentioned in Proverbs chapter seven? The focus there is on harlots and fornication. Bathsheba was probably not a seductress, at least not intentionally, but her lack of clothing in 11:2 could be used as evidence against her. Her relations with David were apparently consensual (C-1), but David is blamed more than her, in part, because he was also a murderer (B-1). — Line A-5 is interesting, since we know that abortion is also murder.

discussion leader (on the nature of sin and God's warning to us)

'Concentual' is a deceptive term. Bathsheba may have been a willing partner, but her husband, Uriah, never gave his consent (C-1)! Neither did God, even though He allowed the sin to remain hidden for a while. Personally, I believe God's purpose in doing so was to more fully warn us about the nature of sin (D-6). It is conceived through lust, grows over time, multiplies, and ends with death. (See James 1:15.) In godless times like ours, there is much to learn about sorrow and happiness from this sad story. — Thankfully, we also have Psalm 51. I love verses eight and 12.

The following discussion was overheard at a men's Bible study. Those present began by discussing the same David & Bathsheba worksheet that the ladies' group used earlier.

history teacher (on the worksheet not being for men)

Yuk! What a one-sided worksheet! Many lines are obviously more for women than for men. Conception, pregnancy, and childbirth are mentioned repeatedly (A-2, A-3, B-2, C-3, C-5), and there is almost nothing about Uriah. The fact that he did not go home as David expected is only mentioned once (A-4). If we want to get something positive out of this chapter, we must think about Uriah. His loyalty and sense of duty contrasts sharply with David's lust. Let's study Uriah!

discussion leader (on more being written about Uriah than Bathsheba)

That's exactly what I was hoping someone would say, since there is far more written about Uriah in the chapter than there is about Bathsheba. Just count the verses! Also, I think our best chance of seeing God in chapter 11 is by looking for him in Uriah's life. The ladies apparently talked about God's part in Bathsheba's conception, but what about in Uriah's rejection of David's attempts to get him to go home? He was loyal to his army unit, but who was God involved as well?

Bible college student (on Uriah's reference to the ark in 11:11)

If it was just loyalty to Joab and the army, Uriah would not have mentioned the ark in verse 11. The ark was the symbol of God's presence, and the usage data in Samuel shows that more than nine times out of ten it was referred to as the ark of the Lord or the ark of God. So I think Uriah would have been thinking about God when he mentioned the ark.

discussion leader (on why God is not mentioned directly in 11:11)

Yes, but why do you think God is not directly linked with the ark in this case. Apparently it is only one of three times it was done in over 60 cases in Samuel. Personally, I think this is a sign of Uriah's humility which may be linked to the fact that he was a Gentile convert. Another possibility is that the author of Samuel wanted to keep God out of the sordid record in chapter 11 as much as possible. What do you think?

history teacher (on human responsibility for sin)

To me the key point here is that God decided to NOT intervene. For instance, the Lord did not cause David to suddenly become ill so that he lost interest in the beautiful woman he had seen. The special providence of God is clearly seen in Esther, but here in Second Samuel chapter 11, like in Genesis chapter three, God allowed the sin to take place, though he did not cause it. God not being mentioned until after the fact helps show that the individuals involved were to blame. So we need to be careful about lust, since God will usually not intervene to prevent sin. Moreover, God seems to hold men more responsible, like with David in the next chapter.

discussion leader (on)

I think the bottom line in this study including what has been said about the worksheet is simply that men and women are very different. Those who foolishly deny this, have failed Humanity 101.

my application
