

Background Characters in the Old Testament

Uriah: Faith of a Foreigner

Lesson #6 for November 6, 2010

Scriptures: Exodus 23:20-33; Deuteronomy 20:16-18; 1 Samuel 26:5-11; 2 Samuel 11; Esther 8:17; Psalm 51; Isaiah 56:30-7; Ephesians 2:19.

1. This lesson focuses on the life and death of Uriah the Hittite. The other two main characters in the story are his wife, Bathsheba, and David. It is all about ethics, integrity, and honesty—keeping your word when you make a vow.
2. We live in a world where ethics has almost become a bad word. People at every level including members of Congress and even presidents are constantly being investigated for ethics violations. It is almost as if there were no moral absolutes.
3. What about us? Do we live according to an absolute integrity? Or, are we daily committing mild “inconsequential” ethics violations? Does the fact that the whole world around us is doing so make it okay? If we maintain a complete honesty and integrity, do our friends think we are straight-laced and fanatical?
4. Let us take a moment and review what we know about the principal characters in this lesson. Uriah is consistently referred to as a Hittite. What do we know about the relationship that God intended for the children of Israel to have with the Hittites? (Exodus 23:20-23; Deuteronomy 20:16-18) Why did the directions about the Hittites and others change? Notice particularly why God did not want the children of Israel associating with those nations.
5. 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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, November 2.
6. If you remember the story, when Abraham first went to Egypt, Pharaoh took Sarai to be one of his concubines. When he discovered that she was Abram’s wife, he returned her to Abram but then told Abram to leave the country. As a result, Pharaoh forbade Egyptians from having anything to do with groups that were shepherds. As a result, when the Israelites went to Egypt later, they were not allowed to settle among the Egyptians but were given a special area around Goshen where they could live! That kept them from disappearing into Egyptian society. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 130,131)
7. Earlier, during the days of Jacob and Esau and continuing down through the early days of the judges, there was a very powerful group which was of Indo-European descent that invaded central Turkey—at that time known as Anatolia—and formed a mighty empire. The name *Hittite* means a descendent of Heth. Heth was the second son of Canaan, and thus, the grandson of Ham and great grandson of Noah. Of course, it is possible that one or the other of these groups were named after a different Heth.
8. When the Israelites invaded Palestine, they were instructed to wipe out the pagan fertility-cult-worshiping tribes/nations that lived there. Those nations maintained temples with both male and female prostitutes as part of their worship services. There are 17 lists of those tribes in Scripture. In five of these lists, the Hittites are mentioned first; (Deuteronomy 7:1; 20:17; Joshua 9:1; 12:8; 2 Chronicles 8:7) and in the other twelve, the Hittites are mentioned second or third. (Exodus 3:8; 3:17; 13:5; 23:23; 23:28; 33:2; 34:11; Joshua 3:10; Judges 3:5;

1 Kings 9:20; Ezra 9:1; Nehemiah 9:8) They apparently lived in the hill country of Judea. It was God's original plan that those tribes were to be driven out by natural forces; (Exodus 23:20-33; contrast Deuteronomy 20:16-18) and after the Israelites were established, they could reach out to these people and try to convince them to become worshipers of Yahweh. It is very clear in God's instructions to them that the danger of those foreign nations was that they would lead Israel to accept their pagan religions.

9. The fact that Uriah was given a Semitic name honoring Yahweh suggests that his family was among the relatively small number of people who were actually attracted into Israelite society and who became a part of Israel. Uriah himself was one of the 37 famous soldiers that were loyal to David. (2 Samuel 23:8-39; 1 Chronicles 11.10-41) Many of these men joined David because they were either related to him or had some conflict with the government of Saul. They lived with David through those difficult times when he was on the run. They were famous because of their superior military skills.
10. The life and character of David are well-known; so, we will not review them here.
11. Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam and apparently the granddaughter of Ahithophel, one of David's most trusted advisers. Thus, Bathsheba was a recognized member of one of the honored families of Israel. Ahithophel joined the forces of Absalom against David and then committed suicide when Absalom and his forces were defeated. The rebellion was at least partially because of what David did to Ahithophel's granddaughter, Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 17:23)
12. Why do you think David stayed home instead of leading the military out to war? 2 Samuel 11:1 clearly indicates that this was the time of year when kings usually went to war. David had been a soldier most of his life. Why was this time different?
13. There are other questions raised by this story. (2 Samuel 11) Why was David staying in Jerusalem while his army was fighting the Ammonites? Bathsheba had apparently been married to Uriah for some time, but they never had any children. What kind of relationship does that imply? Why is it that a single encounter with David resulted in a pregnancy? Was Uriah not able to have children? Did God or the Devil make sure that Bathsheba became pregnant from this one encounter so that David's sin could not be hidden? Compare the story of Ruth and her first husband. (Ruth 1:1-5) Why didn't Ruth get pregnant from her first husband? Would she have gone to Bethlehem and married Boaz if she had had children? Does God sometimes control women's fertility? (Genesis 20:17,18; Genesis 38:12-30) Notice that each of these women made it into the ancestry of Jesus as documented in Matthew 1. Did God cause all of these things to happen? Or, did He allow Satan to do it? Or, was it all just accidental? Why did God mention these women specifically in the ancestry of Jesus? Even though all of these things happened, wouldn't you have left them out of the report in Matthew 1? Jesus was born from that line of ancestors. He inherited many of our sinful tendencies, but He still managed to live a sinless life.
14. It is obvious that David is the most powerful figure in this story from a human standpoint; but from God's perspective, sin was clearly in control. David's sexual and emotional drives had clearly overpowered his integrity, morality, and sense of duty to God. Was that just a momentary lapse in David's experience? It certainly resulted in a huge change in David's life. Four of his sons died either directly or indirectly as a result of that experience. (Bathsheba's first baby, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah) He never again had the moral standing in the nation as he had had prior to that event.
15. By contrast, Uriah's whole story focuses on his dedication to David, his duty as a soldier, and his integrity before God.

16. Did Bathsheba have anything to say about this encounter with David? Did she try to object in any way? Was she in any way responsible for David's sin? Did she have any idea that David could see her bathing?
17. We have stories of other foreigners who became integrated into Israelite society. We think of Ruth and Rahab as outstanding examples. Both of them, we should notice, ended up being ancestors of David and Jesus! David also had other Hittites serving among his soldiers. (1 Samuel 26:6)
18. Were the children of Israel as a group partially responsible for David's sin because they did not follow God's directions to destroy or drive out all the Canaanites including the Hittites earlier in their history? (Exodus 23:20-33; Deuteronomy 20:16-18)
19. What was the real reason why Uriah did not go home to his wife when he came home from the battle even after David as the king of Israel instructed him to do so? If you had been Bathsheba and you learned that your husband had spent two nights in Jerusalem and had not even come by to say, "Hi," what would you say? Cultural norms have changed in our day!
20. According to Jewish tradition, when they entered the military, Israelite soldiers took a vow not to engage in sexual activity while they were on duty in the military. (2 Samuel 11:11) The vow mentioned at the end of this verse suggests that Uriah had previously taken such a vow or was at that time taking such a vow.
21. Vows were taken very seriously in ancient Israel. Vows were to be observed even at great cost to the one making them. (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:23; Psalm 15:4)
22. Uriah's name is a Semitic, Israelite name honoring Yahweh. His name means "my light is the Lord" or "the flame of the Lord." It is difficult to know whether the biblical names that we are familiar with were the ones given to these individuals at birth or whether possibly the names were changed at a later time to more correctly reflect their characters.
23. Abram had his name changed to Abraham. (Genesis 17:5) Jacob had his name changed to Israel. (Genesis 32:27,28) Daniel and his three friends had their names changed from Jewish names to Babylonian names when they were taken into Babylonian captivity. (Daniel 1:6,7) For some unexplained reason, we usually continue to refer to Daniel by his Hebrew name—possibly because the book written by him uses that name—while his three friends are usually referred to by their Babylonian names.
24. The New Testament repeatedly admonishes us to grow spiritually into mature Christians. (2 Peter 1:5-7; Philippians 4:8; Ephesians 4:11-16) Is that the story of our lives? Is your life more like that of David in this story, or more like that of Uriah? Are we developing the fruit of the Spirit? (Galatians 5:22,23)
25. The Bible is unique among ancient documents recording histories of various peoples. This story of David's sin and problems and other similar stories would never have been recorded in the records of the Egyptians, Moabites, Assyrians, etc. In those records, their military and government leaders never did anything wrong or suffered any failure. As we have noted in the past, this makes the Bible much more believable and clearly a more reliable record of the facts. How many of those histories are we familiar with? We do not read them because we know that they are not reliable! Considering the fact that David's line continued to rule for hundreds of years, is there any evidence that any of the subsequent kings tried to "clean up" the family history? Why were these stories preserved?
26. 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. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 717; *Conflict and Courage* 177)

27. Why did God include all of these sinful stories about His ancestors in the Bible? (1 Corinthians 4:9) We need to see the terrible results of sin even among God's chosen people. Maybe, they were even chosen because they would so clearly demonstrate such a wide variety of problems! The only Example that is safe for us to follow is Jesus. We must never grow proud and think that we can manage ourselves without God's guidance, or we will end up as David did in this story. Solomon's sins led to the split of the nation of Israel. Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba.

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