



Research article



**DAVID, INCULPABLE OF URIAH'S BLOOD: RE-READING 2
SAMUEL 11:8–13**

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ABSTRACT

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The article argues that Uriah died due to Yahweh's hatred for the Hittites. The Deuteronomist was very interested in telling us how David was very promiscuous and ungodly. However, when an exegesis was done on the study text, it was discovered that Yahweh, as well as Bathsheba, should be held responsible for the death of Uriah. Furthermore, it was proven that David did all he could to make Uriah escape being killed, but Providence being orchestrated by Yahweh made it clear that Uriah was not ready to give heed to the pleadings of David. Moreover, Yahweh hated the Hittites, the tribe of Uriah. Yahweh warned the Israelites right from the beginning that they should annihilate the Hittites from the land. Thus, David was a tool used to achieve this aim. This research piece adopted the narrative analysis of historical-critical methodology in arriving at these findings.



Introduction

Whenever the issue of David and the death of Uriah are mentioned, David is being presented as an adulterer and a murderer. David, the youngest of the eight sons and the youngest of the children of Jesse, became king of Israel (c. 1010–970 B.C.). He was chosen by Samuel to replace Saul, whom the Lord had rejected due to his disobedience (Isaac 13:9). David, notwithstanding the threats to his life both internally and externally, was able to come out strong. For example, Saul told his son Jonathan and his officers to kill David (Ist Samuel 19:1–7); he threw a spear twice at David, trying to kill him (Ist Samuel 19:8–10), in Ist Samuel 19:11–17. Michal deceived his father Saul by symbolising David with an idol, aiding David's escape through the window when Saul planned to nail him to the bed. Saul chased him twice in the wilderness so as to kill David. Nevertheless, David was not deterred by all these anomalies; he became a tool in the hands of Yahweh for the deliverance of the Israelites. This could be seen in the fact that David was able to capture most lands for the Israelites, especially Jerusalem, which he made the capital of Judah and Israel. David restored the dignity that the nation of Israel had lost. On how David was able to get dominance over Jerusalem, Spiro (n.d :1) puts that :

For the 440 years since the Jewish people first entered the Land of Israel until the time of King David, Jerusalem has remained an unconquered non-Jewish city in the heart of a Jewish country. It is a city-state inhabited by Canaanite tribe called Jebusites (the Arab village of Silwan, just south of the walls of the Old City, is located there now). It is heavily fortified, yet despite its seemingly impregnable appearance, Jerusalem has one weakness—its only source of water is a spring outside the city walls. The spring is accessed from inside the city by a long shaft carved into rock.

Notwithstanding all these achievements of David, the Deuteronomist was very interested in portraying David as adultery and a murderer. In 2 Samuel 11:8–13, David is said to have killed Uriah. The Deuteronomist says that David was rebuked by Nathan for this action of his. David had an immoral act, otherwise called adultery, with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and the Deuteronomist explains that in order to conceal his actions of adultery, David killed Uriah. The Deuteronomist gave a little appreciation to the defeat of the Philistines, Arameans, Ammonites, and Edomites by David. Furthermore, the restoration of the land of Jerusalem by David was taken with a pinch of salt by the Deuteronomist. Much interest was placed on David's immoral lifestyle. Thus, the thrust of this paper is to solve these puzzles: Could David, who has shown fear towards God, voluntarily take the life of Uriah? Wasn't David's murder of Uriah a benefit to Bathsheba, Uriah's wife? Could it not be that Uriah died as a continuation of the policy of the extermination of the Hittites, which Yahweh was very interested in? These are the issues that this research piece tends to confront. The narrative analysis of historical-critical methodology was used during the process of this research.



Narrative analysis is mostly used for stories and histories. Hence, narrative analysis helps exegetes appreciate the artistry of the biblical text. Furthermore, it gives room for a proper understanding of the structure, plot, and character of participants, as well as the description of the setting in which the events took place in a story. Narrative analysis reports events from the past. According to Bamberg (2012:78),

narrative analysis attempts to systematically relate the narrative means deployed for the function of laying out and making sense of particular kinds of, if not totally unique, experiences.

It helps with the proper communication of experiences in a particular narrative. Gentz (1986) notes that with setting, plot, and character development, Joseph's story has all the marks of a literary piece that did undergo the same kind of oral transmission as was the case with most of the earlier material in Genesis.

David and Bathsheba's Seduction

Eliam was a father to Bathsheba. Eliam was one of the thirty warriors of David (2 Sam. 23:34). That is why Leithart (2003) explains that Bathsheba was from David's own tribe and the granddaughter of one of David's closest advisors (2 Sam. 15:12). According to Lukyer (n.d.), the other children of Bathsheba were Solomon, Shimea, Shobub, and Nathan.

In 2 Samuel 11, the Deuteronomist sketches that on the day when David was supposed to be in a war, he was walking on the top of his roof (v. 11), leaving Joab and his army on the battle field. In v. 2, it could be reconciled thus: "Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house." The Hebrew phrase וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד was used to explain the movement that David made. וַיֵּלֶךְ comprises the conjunction וַ (and) and יֵלֶךְ with its verbal inflection in *hithpael*, which means to walk to and fro. This form primarily expresses a reflexive action of Qal or Piel, and this can be used in a reciprocal sense (Seow 1995:298). David walked comfortably in and around his house, as every other human being would. Consequently, the house David was living in was a two-story building with staircases; hence, he was at a higher elevation to behold things, both living and nonliving, at an angle of elevation.

On this fateful day that David was strolling in his palace, lo and behold, he saw the naked Bathsheba. It is very likely that the husband of Bathsheba, Uriah, might have told her that David would not be going out to battle, and she purposefully knew and went out to take her bath. According to Honour (2016), Bathsheba intended to be seen by the king, presumably to seduce David and get closer to the seat of power. Probably she was power drunk, hence the strategy she devised to seduce David into sleeping with her. Consequently, as an adulterous wife, she schemed to gain prominence for herself and her child. That is why, rather than resisting, she caved (Higgs, 1999). This entails that she easily gave him adultery by her perceived aggressor, David. Bathsheba lacks the integrity, respect, and honour to say no to



David's demand. Cythia (2017) opines that traditional biblical scholarship holds that Bathsheba couldn't have been ignorant of her home's proximity to the palace, given that David was close enough that he could see her taking a bath outside. What's more, Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, had left her to go fight for David. Summarising, Sara (2017) observes, Bathsheba's first action is bathing, and many have understood her bath to be some sort of exhibitionist act to tempt and seduce David. In songs and art, Bathsheba bathes "on the roof" or naked in the open air. Second, 2 Sam 11:4 says that Bathsheba comes to David when summoned. Those details could be related, Bathsheba bathing in the hopes that David would see her and send for her. Bathsheba's third action in 2Sam 11 is to send a message to David announcing her pregnancy. Perhaps she wanted to have his child and be his queen. In 2Sam 11:26, Bathsheba laments Uriah's death, but maybe those are crocodile tears.

Randall (1990) says that Bathsheba is a willing and equal partner in the events that transpire. This is because she had the opportunity to say no or report the matter to David's wife. Consequently, she was pregnant, and instead of first confessing to her husband, Uriah, she decided to tell David, showing that she was happy to be pregnant for David.

Feminist biblical interpretation of Bathsheba's adultery

Feminist biblical exegetes have given their weight behind the innocence of Bathsheba, noting that it was David who lusted after her. According to Trevour (1994), Bathsheba being "summoned by the king, she must obey." Thus, Bathsheba portrays an innocent and obedient subject to her master and king, David. Trevour (1994:89) furthermore states thus:

...the best modern expression to describe David's action is "power rape," in which a person in a position of authority abuses that "power" to victimize a subservient and vulnerable person sexually, whether or not the victim appears to give "consent." David, the king, appointed by God to defend the helpless and vulnerable, becomes a victimizer of the vulnerable. Just as intercourse between an adult and a minor, even a "consenting" minor, is today termed "statutory rape," so the intercourse between David and his subject Bathsheba (even if Bathsheba, under the psychological pressure of one in power over her, acquiesced to the intercourse) is understood in biblical law, and so presented in this narrative, to be a case of rape—what today we call "power rape," and the victimizer, not the victim, is held accountable.

From the view of the feminist, David was a rapist. He should be sentenced to death for raping Bathsheba, the vulnerable woman who was helpless. Diana and David (2007) observe that David believed no one was off limits to him and that he could wield his power to have whatever and whomever he wanted, even the wife of a neighbour, a loyal servant, and his soldier fighting his war. Bathsheba had no reason not to trust David; he was the God-appointed king for whom her husband was risking his life. Furthermore, Diana and David



(2007) explain that Bathsheba could not resist the proposal from David because when someone who has power and dominion over us and whom we trust is manipulating us, even our ability to sort out right from wrong is confused. Hence, the adultery that took place between David and Bathsheba was totally a fault of David. Furthermore, Campbell and Flanagan (1999:157) observe that, Eliah and Uriah are both listed among David's warriors (23:34-39) hinting that Bathsheba was remembered as a daughter of one and wife of the other. The dual differences stress the injustice toward powerless subordinates.

It could be recalled that Eliah was the father of Bathsheba, and Uriah was the husband. Hence, it has been conjectured that David committed grave sins against two of his most loyal soldiers.

Why was David not in the Battle Front?

Many scholars in literature and renowned scholars have questioned the Davidic motive for not going to battle when it was time for him to be in battle. First, David had fought and needed rest. David's defeat of the Philistines in 2 Samuel 5:17–25; he defeated the Moabites in 2 Samuel 8:2; he defeated the Ammonites in 2 Samuel 10–12; he defeated the Edomites in 2 Samuel 8:13–14. And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went (v. 14), just to mention a few.

In 2 Samuel 11:1, David, during the time that the Kings went for battle, did not sit down silent; he sent Joab to go and defend the frontline of Israel, which was achieved. In v. 1b, Ammonites and its land were destroyed by Joab. The verb used here is *וַיִּשְׁלַח*, which consists of the conjunction and (ו) and a *qaw* consec imperfect 3rd person masculine singular. It was used to signify the direct action of David towards propelling a strong force to repel the Ammonites assault team. David was not a coward not to have defended his people. The force of the Ammonites was not very strong and should not deserve the time and ability of David, as commander in chief of security for the land of Israel.

It is very important to note that to show that the Ammonite assault force was nothing to need the time and energy of David, Joab and his forces effectively destroyed the Ammonites (*וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּשְׁחָדוּ אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן*—and they destroyed the people, 2 Sam 11:1). To destroy means to obliterate, to annihilate, to devastate, or to demolish. According to the Macmillan Dictionary (2017), to destroy means to damage something so severely that it no longer exists or can never return to its normal state. The Oxford Dictionaries (2017) see destroy as ending the existence of something, be it animal or human, by damaging or attacking it. This was exactly the feat that Joab and his military men of valour were able to achieve without the leadership of King David. Hence, David reserves the right to participate or not to participate in a battle. Also worthy of mention is the fact that King David would like to get a successor who would take over commanding the army of Israel; that is why he was training Joab to take over. Joab



(2017) observes that, Joab's successes in the wars against the supporters of Ish-Bosheth, son of the slain Saul, and the heroism that he displayed in the conquest of Jerusalem, confirmed David's confidence in his fitness to be the commander of the whole Israelite army, both in peace and in war. David demonstrated his trust in Joab in the wars in which the latter commanded the army in the field, while David himself remained in Jerusalem. When Hanun son of Nahash, the Ammonite, deliberately provoked David, the Israelite king sent Joab to wage war against the Ammonites and their allies (II Sam. 10; I Chron. 19). In this battle Joab showed his military resourcefulness and his ability to inspire his soldiers with enthusiasm and confidence (II Sam. 10:9–12). David was the type of leader who was interested in grooming people who would take over from him. He was not the type of leader that Saul was. Saul was always trying to dominate all spheres of Israelite livelihood.

Apart from the fact that David was not a glory-centred leader, the battles he fought in the past deserve some rest. For instance, David expanded his kingdom to Phoenicia in the west, the Arabian Desert in the east, the Orontes River in the north, and Etzion Geber (Elath) in the south (David, 2017). King David did more than this. He was able to reunite the loose confederation going on between southern and northern Israel. The whole land came together and decided to make David their king (Jerusalem, 2013). This victory was very important because the first Israelite conquest of the city of Jerusalem was by the tribe of Judah after the death of Joshua—Judges 18:28 (Reuven, 1995), but the people of Israel lost it due to the fact that they did not completely dislodge the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land. The Jebusites were dislodged by David in 1052 BCE (1st Chronicles 11.4–9). In 1st Kings 9:3, Yahweh has chosen Jerusalem for his own to establish his city there. Consequently, he expanded his kingdom by winning victories over the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites and suppressing many rebellions (Nations, 2014).

Uriah, a Victim of Yahweh's hatred for the Hittites

Uriah, in 1 Samuel 11:17, was said to have been killed by David. Scholarly opinions have stressed the fact that Uriah was killed by David so as to conceal the sins that David had with Bathsheba (v. 4). David treated Uriah with the utmost care since Uriah became part of his warriors and armour bearer to Joab, his army commander. Uriah was a professional soldier, had married a Jew, and served faithfully in Israel's army. Uriah is identified as a Hittite and thus was a resident alien in Israel. By Old Testament Law, the *gur*, or resident alien, was granted most of the rights and obligations of a Hebrew (Richards 1991). However, mention must be made that it was Yahweh, right from the beginning of the movement of Israelites in the wilderness, who instructed them to destroy the Hittites. This was because the Hittites were polytheistic in their religious practices. Yahweh doubted the loyalty of Israelites in the midst of their living with the Hittites. Yahweh had already instructed Israel to destroy the Hittites due to their adultery. Yahweh promised to give the Israelites the land of the Hittites (Exodus 3:8, 17, 13:5). Yahweh warned furthermore that the Israelites cut off the Hittites from the face of the earth (Exodus 23:23). Yahweh gave the Israelites a serious warning to



destroy the Hittites (Deuteronomy 20:17) and possess their land (Joshua 3:10). Solomon fell from the favour of God because he married Hittites wives (1st Kings 11:1). Corroborating further, Bryce (1998:135) puts that

...the Hittites believed that the world was populated by a multitude, indeed a plenitude, of spirits and divine forces... The Hittites were polytheists in the fullest possible sense. By the time of the New Kingdom they practised what has been referred to as an extreme form of polytheism. To begin with, local Hattic deities predominated, but with the political and military expansion of the Hittite world, the divine ranks of the pantheon were swelled by new members, many of whom were the gods of the city states and kingdoms that had succumbed to the military might of Hatti. The act of removing the statues of the local gods and relocating them in the temples of the conqueror physically marked the transference of these gods to the conqueror's pantheon.

The death of Uriah was divinely orchestrated, with David as the instrument of actualization. Notwithstanding how humble Uriah, a Hittite, might have served David, Yahweh still made a way for him to be killed so as not to contaminate the people of Israel. His wife, a Jew, was divinely schemed out to leave the Hittite husband she had and get married to a Jewish husband.

In verses . 8–13 of the study text, David tried all he could for Uriah to escape this death, but Uriah, because he has been conditioned by an external force, refused to heed, thus his eventual death. Looking at the text:

⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.

⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰ When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"

¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing."

¹² Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day, and the next.



¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house(Revise Standard Version).

It could be seen that twice, David tried all he could to force Uriah to go home so as to know his wife again that night, hence the coverage of the pregnancy of Bathsheba. David was only trying to protect Bathsheba and the unborn baby. If it were known that she had committed adultery, she would be stoned. Thus, David was poised to protect the mother and the unborn child. David used several avenues to force Uriah to go home, but Uriah refused. David (n.d. :1) puts that:

Uriah placed himself in the category of mored b'malchus, a rebel against the king. As such, Uriah forfeited his life immediately since the extralegal powers of the monarch include the authority to invoke the death penalty upon rebels without the due process of law.

With no other option, David wrote a letter to Joab saying that Uriah deserved punishment. David suggested that Uriah be placed opposite the strongest part of the enemy line and that his comrades should withdraw when the battle began (Maier 1988:126). This was the format that was adopted, and Uriah was easily killed in the battle.

Conclusion

An exegesis of the life and seasons and the relationship of the Hittites, the tribe of Uriah and Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, will not be taken with a pinch of salt. Yahweh, according to his instructions, showed open hatred towards the Hittites and warned the Israelites to totally annihilate them. Hence, Uriah, who was a Hittite, could not be an exemption, notwithstanding that he served in the Israelite army with all due humility. If Yahweh has given instructions for the destruction of the Hittites and David has succeeded in carrying out the instructions of Yahweh, this should be seen as a credit to David. This is so because he did all he could to save the life of Uriah before finally falling to the fate of Yahweh on all Hittites. Also worthy of mention is the fact that the Hebrew Bible used the verb *וַיִּשְׁכַּב*, which means “and he laid,” and as an expression, “lay” was used for the sexual intercourse between David and Bathsheba and does not stress the use of overpowering physical brutality on the part of David, as in the case of the terminology used for the rape of Dinah (Gen 34) and Tamar (2 Sam 13) (Davidson 1996:88). Uriah was a brave and faithful servant to David. David took him for who he is. David was relaxing as a man on the balcony of his rooftop, and behold, he saw the nakedness of Uriah’s wife. He knew her, and she became pregnant. To conceal that act, he put Uriah on the war front and had him killed. David was made to receive all the blame for the death of Uriah.



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