

Uriah: A Study in Character and Suffering

John M. Buttrey II

Throughout the Bible we can find a number of men and women of great character. If asked to identify some of these individuals, most of us could come up with an impressive list of names: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Debra, Samuel, Daniel, Paul, and on and on the list would go. One name that would probably not make anyone's list would be Uriah the Hittite.

Uriah presents to us a wonderful study in character and suffering. As is true with others in Scripture, we see that doing the right thing in life does not always yield reward. On occasion, in spite of doing the right thing, suffering will occur. We can see this very clearly in the life of Jesus (cf 1 Peter 2:20-24).

This is an important lesson for us to learn. We tend to think that doing the right thing will never lead to suffering. However, this is simply not true. It is one of the unfair qualities about life. Perhaps you have personally experienced this frustrating reality of life.

For Uriah the Hittite, the suffering he experienced came from the two people who trusted the most, both of whom respected and admired his character. Those two people were David and Bathsheba.

Uriah was away in battle, fighting for Israel, and for David. This was a place David should have been (2 Sam. 11:1). While Uriah, his faithful soldier, is risking his life, David became captivated with his wife.

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

2 Samuel 11:2-3

I believe we have not properly understood the response given to David's inquiry of the woman's identity. "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Whoever it was that spoke these these words to David, he was telling the king that he knew exactly who she was, and to whom she belonged! That's why the response is in the form of a question.

David knew Uriah. He is listed in Scripture as one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:39). Not only did David know Uriah, it is likely that he also knew, or knew of, Bathsheba prior to this moment. Bathsheba's father, Eliam, is also listed as one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:34). Her grandfather, a man named Ahithophel, is mentioned as David's counselor (2 Sam. 15:12).

When the response came back to David, in question form, regarding the identity of the woman, it should have been more than enough to stop David from proceeding any further. Think of all the people he would be betraying and hurting. Sadly, all David knew about Bathsheba, *her* family, and *his* friends, was not enough to stop him.

David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.

2 Samuel 11:4

We should also not neglect to consider Bathsheba's part in all of this. Did she really not know that she could possibly be seen while she was bathing? Perhaps. Notice also that she is a willing participant in the plot to deceive her husband, especially, when the consequences of her and David's sexual rendezvous became more than apparent.

The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

2 Samuel 11:5

Now what? A pregnancy was the last thing David and Bathsheba expected. That is often the way it is with sin. Seldom do we think about consequences. Seldom do we expect to be discovered.

In the midst of their panic and concern, David comes up with a plan to cover up the matter. He sends word to Joab, his general, to send home Uriah from the battle.

When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war.

2 Samuel 11:7

Quite frankly, I'm not sure at this point David really cared about the welfare of Joab and the state of the war. He was just trying to make Uriah feel at ease, to not let on that anything was wrong.

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

2 Samuel 11:8

When David told Uriah to go to his house, his obvious hope was that he would sleep with his wife. After all, since he had been away from home risking his life, surely he missed his wife. It was a great plan, except for one thing. David underestimated the character of Uriah.

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.

2 Samuel 11:9

This was not according to David (and Bathsheba's) plan. So, David confronts his faithful soldier.

Now when they told David, saying, "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?"

2 Samuel 11:10

Can you hear the panic in David's questions? Because of his involvement in sin, David is unable to appreciate the outstanding character of Uriah. Listen to Uriah's character as he explains to David why he did not go to his home to sleep.

Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, 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? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing."

2 Samuel 11:11

Talk about character! It has been said, "Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones." What a perfect picture of that saying. None of the other soldiers would ever have to know about Uriah's refusal of pleasure. Uriah, could have enjoyed what was rightly his to enjoy by marriage. However, in thinking about his fellow soldiers, he chose not to enjoy the company and pleasure of his wife.

At this point, David gets Uriah drunk in an attempt to compromise the man's character, and cover up his own sin. Once again, David's plan fails (2 Sam. 11:12-13). Finally, in pure desperation, David sends Uriah back to the battle, and places in his faithful hands, sealed orders to Joab his general, to put him on the front lines of the skirmish and to withdraw from him (2 Sam. 11:14-15). Joab follows the king's orders and Uriah is killed.

What a fate for one who had conducted himself so honorably. Uriah suffered death, ironically, because the two people he trusted the most, one of whom he dearly love, betrayed him, as they found themselves caught up in a sin which neither wanted made public.

It is often been asked, why do bad things happen to good people? Answer: Because there are bad people in the world, or we might say, because there are good people who often do bad things. Sometimes suffering comes into our life as a result of our own poor choices, but many times suffering is the result of the selfish and evil actions of others.

Interestingly, for various other reasons, it was David who was called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Uriah received no such description. However, the record of his character in Scripture is outstanding: A man of faith, courage, and honor. Yet, because others made poor choices and did evil, he was the one (in spite of his outstanding character) who suffered. The same can and does happen to us. Let us not be surprised when it occurs.