

Out of Control  
Read 2 Samuel 11

David's plunder into adultery with Bathsheba exposed a defect which brought anguish to the one known as psalmist, giant killer, and "man after God's own heart." The author of 2 Samuel 11 reveals David's flaw through a word which is repeated throughout the passage and ceases in the midst of David's consequences. It is the word "sent."

Not long after David "sent" Joab his commanding officer to battle without him, David strolled along the rooftop of his palace in Jerusalem to seek relief from his insomnia (2 Sam. 11:1). What he "saw" and "sent" for and "took" has drawn many to a mistaken conclusion (vv.2-4). Bathsheba's bath scene was not written as a visual aid to help us appreciate why David fell in love with this woman. The author had a more practical purpose for picturing the situation. Washing signified that she adhered to the prescriptions of the Law which instructed a woman to bathe when she completed her menstrual cycle. Since she had just ended her period, the baby she conceived could not have been her husband's. When the author reports that "David saw a woman bathing" he is letting us know that the babe was definitely David's.

As soon as Bathsheba, wife of the soldier named Uriah, recognized that she was pregnant, she informed David. He reacted with the swift response of a boxer who has just been punched, and sent a message to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite" (v. 6). David would have to produce a scheme to dupe Uriah into believing that his wife was pregnant with his own child. After "Joab sent Uriah to David" (v. 6), David launched plan one: make small talk, encourage Uriah to go home to the bed of his wife, and send a gift (to make him feel honored). The plan, however, was foiled by one proving himself more loyal than David; Uriah slept outside David's doorway with the guards (v.9).

Plan two: get Uriah soused with wine. This one flunked as well. Uriah just would not go home. David needed to devise a strategy which would be failsafe. The suddenness with which the new plot struck David made him euphoric with relief. It would not be considered murder. Uriah would just be doing his duty, at the front of a battle-line, in a perilous position. David could send this message to Joab by way of Uriah himself (v. 14).

It worked. When news of Uriah's death reached Jerusalem, his wife spent the appropriate number of days mourning him. At its conclusion, David "sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife" (v. 27). Not often does Scripture divulge God's opinion about a matter. In this situation, however, God's thoughts are disclosed: "The thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 27).

David had sent his troops to battle without his presence, he had sent for Bathsheba, he had sent for Uriah her husband, he had sent him to his death, and he had sent, once more, for Bathsheba. David is revealed as someone who thinks he is in control; this flaw made him forget something—it is God who is in control; to Him belongs all authority. And God will uncover this with stunning clarity in the following verse: "Then the LORD sent Nathan the prophet to David" (12:1).

"God will raise up evil against you," Nathan told David, "from your own household" (12:11). In the next chapters, Nathan's prediction to David would be fulfilled with garish intensity.

Though David had the maturity to rebound well spiritually, even in the face of the consequences of his sin, children rarely have the capacity to do so. Exhibiting his father's passion by lusting for his half sister Tamar, Amnon lay on a bed as though sick and appealed to his father to have Tamar come to nurse him. David assented and, thus, David "sent" Tamar his daughter—to her rape (2 Samuel 13:1-21). Later, Tamar's full brother Absalom sought revenge for his sister when his father did nothing. Absalom requested that his father let Amnon come to a feast at his home. David agreed and "sent" Amnon his son—to his murder (2 Samuel 13:21-29).

At the beginning of the account, David "sent," and a sexual sin plus a murder was the outcome. With an irony which may cause a chill, we realize that David "sent" again, and a sexual sin plus a murder was committed, this time against his daughter and his son. The consequences confirmed that circumstances were ultimately out of David's control.