

Rebekah Study Questions

1. Why was Abraham so firm about where Isaac's wife should come from? (Genesis 24:1-9) What covenant promises were prophesied to flow through Isaac? Contrast this with Esau's choice of wives later in this story. (Genesis 26:34; 27:46; Genesis 28:8-9)
2. What process did Abraham's servant undertake in looking for a wife for Isaac, and how did God answer his prayers? (Genesis 24:10-27). How do you approach a difficult task when the prospect seems overwhelming?
3. Rebekah and Isaac's love story got off to such a promising start, followed by twenty years of infertility and then a difficult pregnancy. How do you think God's prophecy regarding Rebekah's unborn children impacted her and Isaac as parents? (Genesis 25:23)
4. What did the birthright mean to sons in ancient times, and who do you feel was more to blame about what happened between Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:27-33? What does the interaction tell you about each of the sons?
5. Did Isaac set the example of deception for his family? (Genesis 26:7-11) What was the possible message that sent to Rebekah and their sons?
6. Why was Rebekah willing to betray her husband in such a way? (Genesis 27:1-46) What does it say about her faith in God and His promises? How much responsibility does Jacob bear?



BATHSHEBA

(1 Samuel 11-12, Psalm 51, 1 Kings 1-3:15)

If the name Bathsheba immediately conjures in your mind the image of a scheming seductress who trapped a king into an illicit affair, you're not alone. Like me, you probably saw her Sunday school flannelgraph character gazing over her shoulder with a come-hither look in her eyes. I mean, it was as racy as those storyboards got! Maybe you've learned more about Bathsheba over time as you read the Scriptures for yourself, and you know she's not that one-dimensional woman so easily judged and cast aside. If you're still undecided, I ask you to come with me on a journey to get to know this woman better, to see what the Bible tells us about her extraordinary life—one that changed the course of human history.

BATHSHEBA THE GRIEVING WIDOW

From the moment we're introduced to Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, something is already out of whack. We're told it was "in the spring at the time when kings march out to war" (2 Samuel 11:1), but that King David had not gone along with his army, as he had so many times in the past. Why? I don't know, but staying in Jerusalem gave the king time to get up from his bed one evening and stroll around the palace rooftop. At that hour and from that perch, he saw a "very beautiful woman" bathing herself (2 Sam-

uel 11:2). The Bible gives no indication that Bathsheba thought anyone could see her or that she was attempting to attract attention at that late hour in the space where she bathed privately. In reality, she was fulfilling scriptural requirements for cleansing herself. Here's what happened next:

David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." (2 Samuel 11:3)

It's almost as if the person sent to gather intel on this attractive woman was providing David both information *and* a warning. *She's married... and you know her family.* Time for a little background. In 2 Samuel 23 we find that David knew plenty about Bathsheba's husband. Uriah the Hittite was part of an elite band of thirty "chief warriors" who protected David and fought on his behalf.

We don't know how a Hittite came to be one of the king's most trusted officers and a loyal soldier of Israel, but it might have had something to do with Bathsheba. Did Uriah convert to the Jewish faith because he fell in love with her? It is probable that Uriah was not the name he was born with, because Uriah is a Hebrew name meaning "the Lord is my light." Whoever he was, we know Uriah had made a choice to be who and where he was—and presumably Bathsheba was part of that choice.

Despite his personal relationship with Uriah, David showed zero hesitation when provided with the details about Bathsheba.

Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (2 Samuel 11:4)

That escalated quickly! We have no way of knowing what conversation they may or may not have had, but let's keep the enormous power differential in mind. The army of Israel, which included Bathsheba's husband Uriah, was away in battle on behalf of the king, and she was summoned to the palace. King David's call was not the sort of invitation she could likely refuse.

Put yourself in Bathsheba's shoes for a moment. She was a military wife. Maybe she thought there was news of Uriah. Her heart must have been in her throat as she hurried to the palace, apprehensive about what news awaited her there. Imagine her response when it turned out the news was that King David wanted to sleep with her. Was she flattered? Was she terrified for herself, for the price her loved ones might pay if she refused? The Bible doesn't tell us much, and we don't fully know what her options were in this situation; but it is clear that David, the king, was far more responsible for the sinful fling than the woman who was his subject. We're told Bathsheba returned home after David had what he wanted. She soon learned she was pregnant and then sent word to the palace.

At this point, King David held all the cards. I wonder how frightened Bathsheba must have been in those agonizing days and weeks, realizing she was carrying a child who was clearly not her husband's. She could have been stoned for adultery. Uriah would have been justified in casting her aside completely. Unwilling to take responsibility for his sin, David decided to add to his growing list of transgressions. He plotted to bring Uriah home from the battlefield, in hopes that the brave warrior would sleep with his wife and believe the child to be his own. So David sent word to his top commander, Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite" (2 Samuel 11:6). Once Uriah arrived at the palace, David

warmly greeted him and then sent him home to Bathsheba with a gift.

But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. (2 Samuel 11:9)

Uh-oh. David, you have a problem. Knowing his plan was crumbling, the king called in Uriah to explain why he didn't go.

Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2 Samuel 11:11)

Many scholars who study this time period say the army would likely have been under strict protocols during this battle to remain abstinent. Even though Uriah was brought back to his beautiful wife and the comforts of home, he refused to compromise his integrity. David compelled him to stay another day, and he even got him drunk that night. Still, Uriah resisted whatever pull he must have experienced to go to his own house.

This is yet another inflection point. David had slept with someone else's wife, impregnated her, and then hatched a ruse to make her husband believe the child was his. Enough cars had piled onto the growing wreckage, but there's nothing in Scripture that suggests David even *thought* about confessing and beginning the cleanup mission. Instead, he sent his loyal warrior Uriah away, carrying his own death warrant.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." (2 Samuel 11:15)

Let that sink in: the plot to murder an honorable man, cooked up by the king himself. Uriah was such a devoted soldier that David didn't hesitate to ask him to deliver this confidential letter, which contained instructions for ending Uriah's life, because David knew Uriah would never pierce the seal of secrecy.

As we see David's treachery grow, we learn nothing about how Bathsheba was coping. Did she have any clue what the king was up to? Did she even know Uriah had been in town? It's hard to imagine that word of her husband's unexpected visit hadn't made its way to her. If she heard Uriah was at the palace, she probably figured out that David was trying desperately to cover his tracks. But we see no communication between Bathsheba and the king as he sets his homicidal plan in motion.

So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. (2 Samuel 11:16-17)

Take note: not only was Uriah killed, but the Bible also tells us others lost their lives as part of David's deadly scheme. His plan led to multiple innocent casualties as Joab was forced to send his troops to undertake a risky and pointless action just to disguise Uriah's murder. When word of the deaths reached David,

he didn't crumple in guilt and shame. Instead, he directed a messenger to tell Joab:

Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. (2 Samuel 11:25)

This man who was anointed and chosen by God, who rose from shepherd boy to celebrated king, had become something nearly unrecognizable: an adulterer and a murderer, cold-blooded, calculating, and wicked beyond words. But God has a way of making sure our sins do not remain hidden. Bathsheba's chaotic world was about to get much worse.

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. (2 Samuel 11:26-27)

What a chilling statement. David was in serious trouble. We see throughout Scripture how God deals with those who violate His commands and His trust. As the man handpicked to lead the nation of Israel, David had once been humble and totally reliant on God. Let this be a bright red warning flag to every one of us. Just because we have walked closely with our heavenly Father, trusting Him through impossible challenges and seeing His faithfulness over and over again, does not mean we cannot fall into grievous sin. Our sin rarely starts with adultery and murder, but it begins when we allow our hearts and minds to be distracted and drawn away, even by things that are essen-

tially good. When our ego is flattered or our attention diverted, the tiniest seeds begin to be planted, which will sprout into full-grown weeds. I often find myself due for a good round of weeding when I've allowed things other than the Lord to strip my attention away from Him. As with any garden, weeding out sin isn't a single round of maintenance. It's a lifelong work of tending and trimming and discarding what isn't good fruit.

At what point did the field of David's heart become so overgrown with sin? And what about Bathsheba? We still don't know what she was feeling or thinking through any of this, only that she was once again summoned to the palace for an offer it's unlikely she had autonomy to refuse: marriage to the king.

At this point, David may have thought he'd finally extinguished the wildfire of sin he launched on that rooftop walk months earlier, but it's impossible to forget the scorched earth it left behind. God certainly hadn't, and He was about to show up and pronounce judgment on David via Nathan the prophet.

As 2 Samuel 12 begins, God has revealed the truth to Nathan, who then confronted the king.

When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him.

Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. (2 Samuel 12:1-4)

Nathan's story of injustice and cruelty evokes all kinds of emotions, from grief to anger. What arrogance for a man who has so much to take the one adored, loved possession from someone who has little else! Not surprisingly, David saw it the same way.

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." (2 Samuel 12:5-6)

And *this* is the one moment in the Bible that, whenever I read it, I can't get one particularly saucy daytime talk show out of my head. It's like I can hear Nathan yelling, "You *are* the father!" But it doesn't go exactly like that....

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" (2 Samuel 12:7-12)

Like so many of us, David had assumed that in the story of his life, he was the hero, the good guy, the one who loved God and tried to do what was right. But without noticing it, David had become the rich man in Nathan's parable—heedless of others, careless with people's lives, treating the less fortunate as objects to be used and expended at will. He had let his army go off to war without him, and he had spent his free time ravishing the wife of a war comrade. He'd arranged an honorable man's murder, and in the process betrayed even more of his loyal soldiers who fought to put him on the throne. Despite his riches, he stole from a man of integrity.

How agonizing that must have been for David to realize what he had become! Remember, he'd once been identified as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). David's repentance was immediate and profound. Nathan assured the king that his sin had been forgiven by God, but he warned David that God's punishment would be incredibly painful. David's betrayal of the marriage bond between Bathsheba and Uriah meant that his own wives and concubines would be betrayed into the hands of someone else—as indeed happened, when his son Absalom violated the king's concubines in the sight of all Jerusalem. But in the more immediate future, Nathan told David that the child he had conceived with Bathsheba would die. David spent days

pleading for the child's life, weeping, mourning, fasting, and begging.

For all his sins—and they were many—David also experienced extraordinary closeness to the Lord. Maybe it was because he had known such sin in his life that he eventually came to understand the mercy and love of the Lord in an even deeper way. Whatever David did, he did with his whole heart—fighting, loving, sinning, praying, repenting. Even after he heard the verdict of God from the mouth of the prophet Nathan, he refused to give up. He knew well the merciful nature of God, and he held on to the hope that while there was life in his son's body, there was a chance the dreadful verdict could be turned aside. So David gave himself completely over to prayer. Yet Nathan's prophecy proved true, and the boy died.

The child of David and Bathsheba is not given a name at any point in this story, and we don't see Bathsheba's experience as this tragedy is unfolding. As readers, we are left with the question: What did Bathsheba know about any of this? It could be that until Nathan's public reproach of the king, and David's public repentance, Bathsheba had no idea about the circumstances of her husband's death. It must have been devastating, either way. Her current husband was revealed to be a liar and a murderer, and her precious and innocent child, who had nothing to do with any of the decisions of his parents, suffered because of it. The thought of Bathsheba's suffering here is almost unbearable. In the case of Bathsheba, we have to resort to some guessing about what she must have been thinking about David. But the grief of watching your only child waste away in a sickness that you can't stop, in cries that you can't soothe, is a universally understood human emotion.

We live in a world that finds grief troublesome, embarrassing. We don't live with death every day, the way our ancestors did. We don't wash and clothe our own dead anymore; we don't keep vigil over their bodies for days. In our culture, the reality of death exists at a distance from us—and some of that is a good thing! The problem is that when death is separated from the practical reality of our lives, grief can become something strange, unnatural, almost shameful. When we see someone overcome with grief, maybe sobbing, too often our reaction is embarrassment. Or worse, we may think that an extravagant display of grief means a lack of faith.

For many of us, it's not easy to be vulnerable when we're struggling. I remember after my father died suddenly, I felt like I'd been thrown into a parallel universe that no one else was inhabiting. Financial matters were left unresolved, court battles bubbled up, and I felt like I didn't have time to grieve. There was too much else to do, and when people asked how I was doing, it was easier to say, "Well, I know I'll see him again one day" than to unload the tidal wave of grief I felt might drown me. I distinctly remember being on the treadmill at the gym trying to hold it together and thinking, *The person bouncing along next to me has no idea I just lost my dad and I might completely lose it any second.* As a Christian, I worried that falling apart might telegraph that my faith was weak.

But grief is a good and healthy reaction to a fallen world. Our grief tells God that we cherish His gifts to us—we cherish them so much that we sometimes can't imagine our lives without them. Our pain tells God how much we value life. Too often mothers who lose their children—especially mothers who lose their babies before they are even born—feel they need to hide their anguish.

I don't for a second think God asks that of us. Who better understands the grief of watching a child suffer and die than our own heavenly Father? He has suffered as we do, and He will meet us in our grief. Psalms urges us, "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken" (55:22) and reminds us "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted" (34:18).

I think this is an important spot for a bit of a biblical rabbit hole. I've often found comfort in the words David wrote in Psalm 51, when he was begging for God's forgiveness. As I suspected, experts believe this psalm was written after he was confronted by Nathan with the gravity of what he'd done. He pleaded for mercy, admitted the depth of his sin, and accepted that the Lord's verdict against him was just and true.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me....
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise. (Psalm 51:10-12, 16-17)

David was broken. Have you been there? I sure have, left only with the remnants of my selfish choices and guilt over those I wounded. Few of us will ever weave a web as tangled and deadly as David did, but it's likely all of us will have regrets over some

of our sinful choices. Take heart, there is redemption. No matter how minor or monstrous our transgressions, God's forgiveness is ours for the asking (Psalm 103:12).

We see after the child's death that David pulled himself together and "went into the house of the LORD and worshiped" (2 Samuel 12:20). This is also the first glimpse we have of any tenderness between David and Bathsheba. Rather than casting her away as someone he no longer needed around,

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him. (2 Samuel 12:24)

Perhaps in this we can see their reconciliation, and Bathsheba's forgiveness of her husband. For the first time, maybe, they have come to understand each other. The name they gave their little boy means "peace."

Let's take stock of Bathsheba's story to this point: summoned by the king for his pleasure, then sent home. Pregnant with a child who was not her husband's, widowed, married to the king, and then stripped of her child. Finally, some joy in her life with the arrival of Solomon. In a movie, this might be where the credits would roll and they'd all live happily ever after. In this case? Not a chance, but it *is* the beginning of a new life for Bathsheba, one that will give her back her voice in the palaces of David.

BATHSHEBA THE MOTHER OF ISRAEL

If you've spent much time in church or studying the Bible you've heard of Bathsheba and you've heard of Solomon, but you may

not have realized their connection. This is the part of Bathsheba's story when we discover her enormous influence in shaping the nation of Israel. Bathsheba is also only one of a handful of women referenced in the lineage of Christ (Matthew 1:6). All of this telegraphs to us that she isn't just a footnote in David's story, but a woman who came to be a power player in her own right.

Solomon was not the oldest of David's sons, but it appears he had favor with his father from the beginning. And when it came to advocating for her son, Bathsheba was a lioness. No longer a grieving young woman, she learned to navigate royal politics all too well. That skill cemented Solomon's place on the throne, but not without some serious challenges.

When we meet up with Bathsheba again in 1 Kings 1, David is fading. He's so old and frail his servants searched the kingdom for a beautiful young woman, and they found Abishag to keep him warm by sleeping beside him, though the Bible tells us there was no sexual relationship. The king was no longer young and virile, so the race to replace him was on.

Leading the pack was his son Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. We're told in 1 Kings 1:5 Adonijah kept putting himself forward and saying, "I will be king!" He pulled together chariots and dozens of men to run ahead of him. We also get a couple more nuggets: he was "very handsome" (1 Kings 1:6), and David had never rebuked or chastised him over his behavior. Adonijah was also quite a schemer, conspiring with David's one-time military master, Joab. Working to lay his claim to the throne, Adonijah sacrificed scores of animals and invited people from all over the kingdom to join him. Guess who he left off the guest list?

But he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon. (1 Kings 1:10)

And it's not like they weren't going to hear about the massive party!

Nathan wasn't going down without a fight:

Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it? Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go in to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and add my word to what you have said." (1 Kings 1:11-14)

Nathan's and Bathsheba's lives were potentially on the line. A change in leadership would mean changes for everyone, those who stayed in power and those who would be eliminated as threats.

The Bible doesn't tell us if David actually made that vow, or if he did, why. It might have been a promise born of David's guilt because of the way he had wronged Bathsheba in murdering her husband, and because he felt responsible for the death of their first son. Or it might have been because David had come to truly love Bathsheba, and he wanted the child of his love to sit on

his throne. As with the stories of Isaac and Joseph, we see the younger son raised up in the story of God.

In any case, Bathsheba and Nathan had a game plan.

Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. Bathsheba bowed down, prostrating herself before the king.

"What is it you want?" the king asked.

She said to him, "My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.' But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it. He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant. My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his ancestors, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals." (1 Kings 1:15-21)

Reading this, it's hard not to think, *Wow! Where was this woman earlier?* Bathsheba went from saying nothing at all to speaking boldly in entire paragraph! Over the years, it seems, Bathsheba had become an eloquent, fearless woman who was canny enough to know what was going on in the city and brave enough to advocate for her son, Solomon. She was smart in the way she approached the king. She hit David where he was most

vulnerable—his pride. She told him that Adonijah was behaving as king, "and you, my lord the king, do not know about it." And then she showed him a way to gain his pride and his honor back, reminding him that "the eyes of all Israel are on you." Perhaps she was appealing to his past, when he was the center of attention, a glamorous young war captain cheered by the women of Jerusalem. But she also knew David's awareness that his voice still carried weight in Israel. Bathsheba knew very well what she was doing, and exactly which buttons to push.

What could this change in Bathsheba mean? For one thing, of course, she was older and surer of herself. But if she was largely silent before, it was because she had only herself to advocate for. Now, she was a mother, and in defense of her son Solomon she had become fearless. How ironic that Bathsheba made an alliance with the very man who confronted David about his shameful sin in taking Bathsheba and having her husband killed. It's clear she had a fondness for him, having named one of her other sons Nathan!

Right on cue, Nathan showed up and repeated the story: Adonijah was declaring himself king, celebrating lavishly and putting together his new administration while David was on his deathbed. David jumped into action before it was too late, saying before Bathsheba:

The king then took an oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place." (1 Kings 1:29-30)

And to make it official, David called in some of his most trusted men, including Nathan.

He said to them: "Take your lord's servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon. There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah." (1 Kings 1:33-35)

David left no room for discussion, and Solomon became king. It was the worst possible news for the feasting Adonijah and his guests.

At this, all Adonijah's guests rose in alarm and dispersed. But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. (1 Kings 1:49-50)

The game was over, and Adonijah—and anyone allied with him—was now in real trouble. Going to cling to the horns of the altar in the tabernacle was basically a last-ditch effort at not being killed, a place of safety. And so the negotiations began.

Then Solomon was told, "Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'"

Solomon replied, "If he shows himself to be worthy,

not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, but if evil is found in him, he will die." (1 Kings 1:51-52)

With a deal in place to spare his life, Adonijah was permitted to return home safely. But he would soon reveal himself to be less than wise.

After David's death, as Solomon was busy cementing his hold on the throne, something fascinating happened: Bathsheba was petitioned by Adonijah himself.

Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. Bathsheba asked him, "Do you come peacefully?"

He answered, "Yes, peacefully." Then he added, "I have something to say to you."

"You may say it," she replied.

"As you know," he said, "the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But things changed, and the kingdom has gone to my brother; for it has come to him from the LORD. Now I have one request to make of you. Do not refuse me."

"You may make it," she said. So he continued, "Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife."

"Very well," Bathsheba replied, "I will speak to the king for you." (1 Kings 2:13-18)

This may seem like an odd, but relatively unobtrusive, request to us. David had not slept with this young woman. But remember, she was considered part of David's kingdom, his kingdom.

In those days, taking possession of someone's harem or wives was seen as a power grab. Adonijah knew he couldn't approach King Solomon with a request like that. Adonijah's (not-very-smart) plan meant that he would need someone the king trusted to be his advocate—and whom did Solomon trust more than his mother? Bathsheba had become not just the mother of the king but also his most trusted counselor. If you wanted something done, the implication is, you had to go through her. She probably had a line of people waiting at her door every morning, hoping to persuade her to take their petitions to the king. Bathsheba had clearly become a force to be reckoned with in the kingdom.

What could account for this change? The idea that the mother of the king exercised special prerogatives appears nowhere in the Bible before Bathsheba. In fact, the name of King David's mother never even appears in the Bible at all! Adonijah and Absalom are mentioned as being the sons of David's wife Haggith, but she never makes an appearance in the story either. So Bathsheba's prominence has but one explanation: her son Solomon.

For reasons we can only speculate about, the bond between Bathsheba and Solomon must have been an extraordinary one. Look at how King Solomon greeted his mother when she entered his presence:

When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat down at his right hand.

"I have one small request to make of you," she said. "Do not refuse me."

The king replied, "Make it, my mother; I will not refuse you." (1 Kings 2:19-20)

Solomon immediately saw Adonijah's bid to marry Abishag as just more rebellious plotting on his brother's part. Though Scripture doesn't tell us, I often wonder whether Bathsheba *knew* that's exactly how Adonijah's appeal would come across to Solomon—making her happy to deliver the inappropriate request. And even though Solomon wouldn't fulfill his mother's request, he had no anger toward her. Look at how he had treated Bathsheba upon her arrival. He had a throne brought in just for her, and she sat at his right hand: the place of honor, reserved for the king's chief counselor. This position of the honored queen mother was new. After all, the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, had come from obscurity, with unheralded parents. But it seems Bathsheba's entire adult life had taken place in the world of palaces and kings. Despite her difficult start, she had finally received a throne of her own.

This is the love of a son for a mother whose devotion to him he has seen over and over again, throughout the years. Were Bathsheba and the beloved Solomon treated as outsiders in the court of King David? Were they the targets of resentment? She may have felt like a cloud covered the bond between her and David, even before David's full treachery came to light, and to have a son to pour her love into after such grief and loss must have been healing for her. It appears Bathsheba and Solomon's bond may have elevated the mothers of kings to a new place of prominence. If you follow the rest of the book of Kings and its long lists of the rulers of Judah, the introduction of each king follows a certain formula. Take a look at Solomon's son Rehoboam:

Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name. *His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite.* (1 Kings 14:21) [emphasis added]

And look at Rehoboam's son Abijah:

In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijah became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem three years. *His mother's name was Maakah daughter of Abishalom.* (1 Kings 15:1-2) [emphasis added]

It goes on like that, all through both books of Kings, right down to the very last king of Judah, hundreds of years later:

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. *His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah.* (2 Kings 24:18) [emphasis added]

From that point on, in every single introduction of a king of Judah, the mother's name is mentioned alongside the king's. In fact, the term *queen* in the records of the kings of Judah means not the king's wife, but the king's mother! Such was the honor paid by Solomon to his mother that the tradition of the queen mother was forever ingrained in the story of Israel.

Sometimes as a mother you may think that all your devotion to your children—all the countless hours spent making lunches

or driving to doctors' appointments and sports practices or organizing meals and vacation and laundry—has gone unnoticed. The kids pile out of the car without a backward glance or a thank-you, and it can seem like none of it matters. Bathsheba probably had those days with Solomon, but it's clear her son treasured her counsel and care. If you are a mother, you are constantly planting seeds of love and guidance—though you may sometimes wonder if you'll see the fruit of that this side of heaven.

For Bathsheba, who walked through devastating loss in the death of her first son, part of her reward was the joy of seeing Solomon seated on the throne, which was largely the result of her willingness to speak up and intervene with the help of Nathan. What might have happened to Israel under Adonijah's rule? Instead, the nation was led by a man often called the wisest to ever live.

In 1 Kings 3, we see the Lord was pleased and said to Solomon, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Here's how their conversation went:

"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth

and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. (1 Kings 3:9-13)

Amazing on so many levels! A man humble enough to know he needed what only God could give him: the wisdom to guide the people under his care. And a God generous enough to give him not only that, but wealth and honor to boot!

Bathsheba, a woman so often disregarded (then and now) and one who endured excruciating loss, gave birth to the man who would bless God's people abundantly through his wisdom and kind rule. Not only that, but she was instrumental in making sure Solomon found his way to the throne. There is so much more to Bathsheba's story than you may have known, and the Bible is full of other compelling people who may have been quite different from what you thought! They are complex and flawed *and* used by God, which is reassuring and welcome news for all of us.

Lord God, Sustainer in our grief and in our joy: give us the strength to bring our heartbreak to you. Transform our grief with the power of Your presence. Give us the courage to face suffering and sorrow and loss. Please remind our fragile hearts that You are always working for the greater good of Your ultimate plans, which are for Your glory. Help us to know that our beginnings and circumstances do not dictate our joy and that the seeds of our pain and past may give bloom to bountiful, beautiful fruit beyond our imaginations.

Bathsheba Study Questions

1. What was your impression of Bathsheba before reading this chapter? Did your perception of her change after studying her story? If so, how? Why do you think she is sometimes portrayed in a way that doesn't line up with Scripture?
2. What were the numerous decisions by David that resulted in Bathsheba's pregnancy? Were there warning signs and opportunities for him to put the brakes on his attraction to her? (2 Samuel 11:2-4)
3. After learning Bathsheba was pregnant with his child, how did David actively choose to dig even deeper into his pattern of sin? (2 Samuel 11:6-26) Did David express remorse over his decisions? Have you ever entered into a season of willful sin? What lies did the enemy tell you about what you were doing?
4. How did David react when confronted with his sin? What does true repentance look like? (2 Samuel 12:1-23) What does God promise to those who confess their sins, repent, and turn from them? (Psalm 103:12; 1 John 1:9)
5. What do we learn about David's parenting style, and how did that impact the behavior of his sons?

6. How did Solomon ultimately become king? What was Bathsheba's role? What do we know about the kind of man she had raised in Solomon? (1 Kings 3:7-14) Contrast Bathsheba's role as a mother with Rebekah's. What can we glean about their mothering in light of how their sons turned out?



MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

(Luke 1, Luke 2:22-35, Matthew 2:13-18,
Luke 2:41-52, John 2:1-11, John 19:22-27, Acts 1:12-14)

When we think of biblical motherhood, we often think of Mary first. From the beginning, she is offered to us as an example of deep faith and trust in a situation that was unlike any other. Profoundly humbled by her assignment as the earthly vessel for the Savior, she rejoiced in her calling—even though she had to know many would never understand or believe the story. Mary's joy as a mother must have been immense: the elation of receiving the angel Gabriel's message that she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah, the pride she must have felt in watching her divine son grow up and begin His ministry, the euphoria she experienced at His Resurrection. But hers was a story also marked by deep grief and sacrifice.

We most often focus on Mary around Christmastime each year, as the radiant young mother overwhelmed by the miracle happening in her own body. We contemplate the tenderness and wonder with which she must have held her newborn son, God in the flesh. When we happen upon a Christmas crèche or nativity scene, we consider the peace and joy that seem to radiate from her sweet face, as everything is bathed in a golden Christmas glow. But this