

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [215]

### "That is impossible!"

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a



### Background to Our Story

#### II Samuel Chapter 11

**1.** And it was, at the return of the year, at the time of the going out of kings [to battle], and David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed in Jerusalem. **2.** And it came to pass, at the time of evening, that David arose from his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house, and he saw a woman bathing, from the roof; and the woman was very beautiful. **3.** And David sent, and inquired about the woman. And he said: "Is this not Batsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" **4.** And David sent messengers, and he took her and she came to him and he lay with her: and she was purified from her uncleanness; and she returned to her house. **5.** And the woman conceived; and she sent, and she told David, and she said: "I am pregnant." **6.** And David sent to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. **7.** And Uriah came to him, and David inquired concerning the welfare of Joab, and the peace of the people, and the welfare of the war. **8.** And David said to Uriah: "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah departed from the king's house, and there followed him the king's food. **9.** And Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. **10.** And they told David saying: "Uriah did not go down to his house." And David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" **11.** And Uriah said to David: "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open field; and shall I come to my house to eat and to drink and to live with my wife? By your life and by the life of my soul, if I will do this thing." **12.** And David said to Uriah: "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you off." And Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the morrow. **13.** And David called him, and he ate before him, and he drank, and he made him drunk; and he went out in the evening to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but to his house he did not go down. **14.** And it came to pass, in the morning, that David wrote a letter to

Joab, and he sent it by the hand of Uriah. **15.** And he wrote in the letter saying: "Place Uriah at the forefront of the fiercest battle, and go away from him, so that he will be hit and will die." **16.** And it came to pass, when Joab kept watch upon the city that he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew that there were valiant men. **17.** And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab and some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died. **18.** And Joab sent and told David all the facts concerning the war. **19.** And he charged the messenger saying: 'When you have finished telling the king all the facts concerning the war. **20.** And it shall be if the king's anger is aroused, and he says to you: "Why did you approach [so near] the city to wage battle? Did you not know that they would shoot from upon the wall? **21.** Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone upon him from upon the wall, and he died [there] at Thebez? Why did you approach the wall?" And you shall say: "Also your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." **22.** And the messenger went, and he came and told David all that Joab had sent him for. **23.** And the messenger said to David, "When the men prevailed over us and came out against us to the field, then we came upon them as far as the entrance of the gate. **24.** And the shooters shot at your servants from upon the wall, and some of the king's servants died, and also your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." **25.** And David said to the messenger, "So shall you say to Joab; Let not this thing displease you, for the sword devours many time this number; strengthen your battle against the city, and destroy it, and encourage him." **26.** And the wife of Uriah the Hittite heard that Uriah her husband was dead, and she mourned over her husband. **27.** And the mourning [period] passed, and David sent and gathered her to his house. And she became his wife, and she bore him a son. And the thing that David did was displeasing to the Lord.

**Psalms 19:13-14**

"Who can discern mistakes? From unknown sins cleanse me, and from intentional sins spare your servant; let them not rule over me; then I shall be perfect and I shall be cleansed of great transgression."

**Genesis 11:29**

Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah.

**Genesis 17:15**

God also said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.

Sarai	שרי
Sarah	שרה

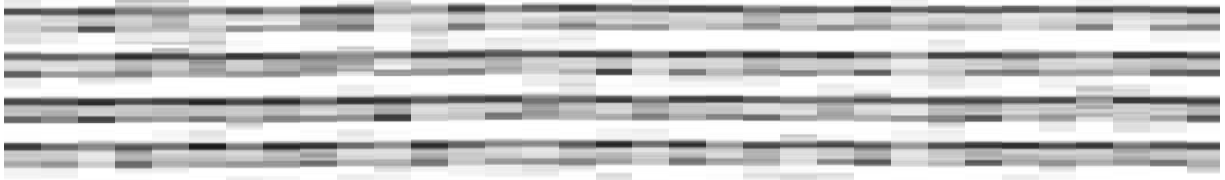
**Numbers 13:16**

<sup>16</sup>These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.

הושע  
Hoshea

יהושע  
Yehoshua

## The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sanhedrin 107a



David said before the Holy One, Blessed is He: - Master of the Universe! - *Who can discern mistakes?* - [The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to David:] - "Your [unwitting sins] are forgiven."

And when David continued: *from unknown sins cleanse me*, - The Holy One, Blessed is He, replied: "Your [unknown sins] are forgiven."

David then proceeded: *Also, from intentional sins spare Your servant*. - The Holy One, blessed is He, replied: "Your [intentional sins] are forgiven as well."

David then said: *Let them not rule over me* - that is, "Let it be Your will that the Rabbis not talk about me." - The Holy One, Blessed is He, replied: "You are forgiven," i.e. your request is granted.

David concluded: *[then I shall be perfect] and I shall be cleansed of great transgression* - that is, "May my offense in taking Bathsheba not be written down in Scripture."

[The Holy One, Blessed is He,] said to [David]: - "That is impossible. - If even the letter *yud* that I removed from the name of Abraham's wife Sarai, when I changed it to Sarah, - stood up and protested its removal for many years, - until Joshua came along and I added [the *yud*] to his name," - as it is stated: *Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua*, - "how much more so is it impossible to erase the entire passage of the Bathsheba episode from the Scripture!"



### Explaining the Story

What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** Why did David request from God to be forgiven on all these different levels?

**Bonus Question ?** How do we know that God forgave David?

**?** Why did David mention one request at a time?

**?** Why did David ask for forgiveness of the unwitting sins first?

**?** Why did David request that his offense not be written in Scripture?

**Bonus Question** **?** Why is it “impossible” for God to acquiesce to David’s request that his offense not be written in Scripture?

### **“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

**!** We can change, we can turn a new page, we can become a “different person,” but we cannot undo history (and for good reasons).

## EPILOGUE

While God is all-forgiving and we can always turn a new page, what is written in the book of our lives cannot be unwritten. King David’s story is our story as well. We all have chapters in the books of our lives we wish were never written, or at least written differently. While there is nothing we can do about the past, the future, albeit somehow limited by our past choices, belongs to us, and the final chapter of our lives is yet to be written.

*“The beauty of life is, while we cannot undo what is done, we can see it, understand it, learn from it and change so that every new moment is spent not in regret, guilt, fear or anger but in wisdom, understanding and love.” - Jennifer Edwards*