

Stories with a Twist [3]

The Test

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a



Background to Our Story

The Biblical 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 Bathsheba, 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.

? What were King David's sins according to II Samuel, Chapter 11?

Bonus ? How do we know that King David knew his actions were reprehensible?

The Amidah (the first blessing)

PATRIARCHS

ברוך Blessed are You, LORD our God and God of our fathers,
 God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob;
 the great, mighty and awesome God, God Most High,
 who bestows acts of loving-kindness and creates all,
 who remembers the loving-kindness of the fathers and will bring
 a Redeemer to their children's children
 for the sake of His name, in love.

? Why do you think we invoke the names of our forefathers in the first blessing?

Abraham's Tests (Avot 5:4 and Avot D'Rabbi Natan Chapter 33)

"Our father Abraham was tested with ten trials and he withstood them all. This demonstrates our father Abraham's great love of G-d" (Avot 5:4)

? What was Abraham's first test? What was his last test?

The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sanhedrin 107b

Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: A person should never bring himself to a test, for David, King of Israel, brought himself to a test – and he stumbled.

[David] said before [God]: - Master of the Universe! - "Why do [people] say in their prayers: 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,' - and do not say, 'the God of David'?"

[God] said to David: - "They (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were tested by Me and withstood the tests, - whereas you have not been tested by Me."

[David] said before [God]: - "Master of the Universe! - Try me and test me!" - As it is stated (Psalms 26:2): "*Try me, HASHEM, and test me, etc.*"

[God] said to David: - "I will test you, - and I will do something with you that I did not do with the Patriarchs. - For I did not inform them in advance that they would be tested, - whereas I am informing you - that I will test you in a matter of physical temptation." - Thereupon, "*it came to pass at evening time, that David arose from his bed, etc.*" (II Samuel 11:2). - Rav Yehudah said: - David arose from his bed at evening, for he had changed his night-bed into a day-bed, - forgetting the rule: - "There is a small organ in the man; - when he satiates it, it is starved, - and when he starves it, it is satiated." - The Scriptural account continues: "*And he walked upon the roof of the king's palace, and from the roof saw a woman bathing; the woman was of exceedingly beautiful appearance*" (II Samuel 11:2). - Bathsheba was shampooing her head underneath a large cone that hid her from view. - Satan came and appeared to [David] in the form of a bird. - [David] shot an arrow at it, - but [the arrow] struck and tore open the cone. - Thus, [Bathsheba] was exposed to view, - and [David] saw her. - Immediately, - "*David sent and inquired about the woman, and was told, 'Why, this is Bathsheba the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite!'* - *David sent messengers and he took her; she came to him and he lay with her - she had been purified of her state of impurity- and she returned to her house*" (II Samuel 11:3-4).

And this incident is the subject of that which is written by David (Palms 17:3): - "*You examined my heart, searched by night, refined me but did not find [me pure].*"

The Gemara expounds the end of the verse just cited:

- "Let my scheming (*zamosi*) not cross my lips." (Psalms 17:3) – [David] said:
- Would that a muzzle (*zemama*) had fallen upon the mouth of my enemy, - and that he had not said such a thing as a request to be tested.



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did David request to be tested by God?

Bonus ? In the story in Tractate Sanhedrin, God gives David some hints to help him give up his request to be tested. What are they?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? What was David's sin according to the story in Tractate Sanhedrin?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

- ! The "small" sin, "father" of all other sins.

EPILOGUE