

**KING DAVID'S 'POWER RAPE' AND PUNISHMENT; AN EXEGETICAL
STUDY OF 2SAMUEL 11:1-27**

Sokwaibe Queen Ijeoma

Department of Philosophy/Religion

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Email: ijeomaemenogu5@gmail.com (09049828561)

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Ifeanyi J. Okeke (PhD)

Department of Philosophy/Religion

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Email: chilurumogu@gmail.com (08036716310)

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Abstract

David's encounter with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11: 1 – 27 has always been considered as adultery (which implies sexual consent) and the sin of murder of Uriah the husband of Bathsheba. He has always been exempted from the sin of rape especially amongst Christian clerics and Christians at large. David was appointed king due to the demand on Prophet Samuel to give them a king that will lead them in war. David as a king understood the due process on how to appropriately take on a wife. This he showed in case of Abigail. Rape is explained as the use of one's power, position and status over another person to force or coerce that person into sex acts without the person's full consent. David in 2 Samuel 11, sent and 'took' ('took': from the Hebrew root word לקח 'laqach' pronounced 'law-kakh' meaning carry away, fetch, seize, takeaway) Bathsheba. This implied the use of force. David gave an order to his messengers to 'fetch', an order which must be obeyed and even if Bathsheba does not want to go with them. The instruction לקח 'laqach' meaning to fetch, seize implies to forcefully bring with them Bathsheba. This is a command that must be obeyed. Bathsheba at this point had no will power of saying no; this is in fact the use of force to summon Bathsheba before the King, for his sexual gratification despite having many wives and concubines at his disposal. Hence Bathsheba consent was not sort, she was simply taken forcefully to meet the King as he demanded, who then exercised his sexual desires by having sexual connections with her. Having re-examined this encounter between David and Bathsheba which has always been described as adultery (implying Bathsheba sexual consent) it is however evident that the act was actually that of sexual power in other words 'rape'.

Keywords: Rape, Murder, Punishment, King David, Morality

Introduction

The elders of Israel called on Prophet Samuel in 1Samuel 8:4-20 and demanded for a King; a King that would rule over them, protect them from the philistines who were attacking them often at that time and also one who would lead them in battle just like other nations surrounding them. As a result, king David became the second King of Israel after the first King, King Saul. According to the biblical account of 2Samuel 11:1-2, it was the season or period Kings (King: Hebrew; מֶלֶךְ 'melek'; pronounced; 'meh-lek'; meaning royal), go forth in battle. The usage of King in the Hebrew lexicon denotes royalty and the King of Israel at this time was King David. As other Kings went to battles with their armies, the King of Israel; King David stayed back at Jerusalem sending Joab his commander in army, his servants and all of Israel to battle. The biblical account never gave any reasons as to why the King of Israel had to stay back at Jerusalem during the season of battles thereby delegating his duties as King to Joab, his chief commanding officer in battle.

From the biblical narrative, it is clear that King David has failed in the first instance, the reason as to which the people of Israel demanded for a King. Despite been a strong and successful King, and having conquered many Kingdoms, it is safe to say that the King failed in this one obligation as a King during this season of battle. In the successive verses of 2 Samuel 11, as David stayed back at Jerusalem, he decided to take a walk at his roof top, admiring his Kingdom while people fought in battle, there he saw a woman washing herself and she was very beautiful to look upon. In verse 3, David is seen enquiring from his servants who she is. The word enquire here is from the Hebrew root word דָּרַשׁ darash, pronounced daw-rash, meaning properly to tread or frequent; usually to follow (for pursuit or search by implication to seek or ask or search).

David was told who she was, whose wife she is and even whose daughter she is "...and one said, is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? (2 Samuel 11 verse 3 KJV). From the biblical expose, it is quite clear that King David, upon seeing the beautiful lady washing herself, desired to have her immediately. He made enquiries as to who she was; he was given every detail down to her marital status. At this time, kind David already has a full firsthand knowledge as to the full details of the; lady he saw washing herself. To this end, Arvind Theodore (2017) asserts that "desire in itself is not wrong, but in this case, David desired a woman who was already married to another man"

One would think David upon learning the fact that the lady; Bathsheba was married to one of his soldiers; Uriah the Hittite, would therefore stop himself from desiring her since her husband was out there in battle fighting for his nation which King David preceded over.

In verse 4 of 2Samuel 11, King David 'sent' (Hebrew שלח 'shalach'; pronounced 'Sha-lakh'; meaning to bring) his messenger, they took (Hebrew: לקח 'laqach'; pronounced 'law-kakh' meaning to carry away, drawn, fetch, seize, takeaway) her to the King and he lay (Hebrew:shakab; pronounced shaw-kab; meaning to lie down for sexual connection). David already had many wives and concubines; this simply means that he was in fact not womanless. He had many women at his disposal, yet he took another man's wife to satisfy his sexual desires. David J.A Clines (1995), agrees in line with this thought as he opines that "it may seem strange to speak of David, a man with eight principal wives and at least ten others of secondary rank (2 Samuel 15:16) as womanless". Arvind, Theodore (2017) in his work titled "David and his masculine vices" describes David's act of summoning, fetching of Bathsheba and eventually lying with her as a psychological power pressure used on Bathsheba. According to him, David's desire for Bathsheba was not born out of love or even lust but rather was born out of the need to reassure his flagging manhood".

David's action is purely borne out of pride, status and power. In Israel, as in the ancient world, Arvind (2017) has describes a man's ability to collect multiple women supposedly increased his manly status and power. This is true of the story of King David, noting his collection of many women, some he made his wives and others concubines as described by the author of the biblical book Samuel.

Concept of Rape

Rape has been defined by the thesaurus dictionary as the unlawful sexual intercourse or any sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person, with or without force, by a sex organ, other body part or foreign object, without the consent of the victim (thesaurus.com dictionary.com). Russel (2019), however points out that "when most people hear the term "rape", what comes to their mind is the appearance of a masked man, who is seen physically overpowering a woman and hence violently penetrating her". Well yes! That is indeed rape. Russel further argues that "rape goes beyond the aforementioned.

Rape is using one's power, position and status over another person to force or coerce that person into sex acts. Russel calls this "sexual violence"

The act of having sexual relationship with a woman without her full consent is rape. It suffices to say that; David did rape Bathsheba. According to Carolyn (1996), "the idea that rape is a hegemonic process where ever it occurs is not a new thing". Susan Brown Miller in C. Nordstrom posited that rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep women in a state of fear". Relating this assertion to the story of David and Bathsheba, David is not only her King, but the mighty anointed King over Israel who had in time past defeated great nations and even killed a mighty philistine giant by name Goliath when he was just a boy, now he is the King ruling over all of Israel. This same King had given an order to his servants to fetch her; she comes before this King who lies with her. This is what I personally term "Power rape" (using one's position to sexually assault another). It is in this line of thought that Hilary (2021) asserts that "once the Kings intent was clear, she was in no position to refuse his sexual advances, given the power imbalance between them". David (1995) explains this further by stating that "there is in this story on the whole no sexual desire, no love stories, no romances, no wooing, and no daring deeds for the sake of a beloved". He further explains that, this is not a world in which men long for women. It is rather a matter of pride for David and his men, in fact that they have kept themselves clean from women. There is sex in the story of course but it is per functionary and usually politically motivated. The classic case in the David story is that of Absalom who has sex with ten of his father's secondary wives in the sight of all Israel; simply to lay claim to the throne of his father (2Samuel 16:21-23). Even in the case of Bathsheba, the sex is essentially an expression of royal power and it is mu h more like rape than love (David J.A. Clines, 1995).

MugeDemirkir (2019) adds that "acts of rape confirm that women are for men to be used, dominated, and treated as objects. She explains this further in line with what I term 'Feminization of rape victims' as she explains that "this underlying gender ideology helps us to understand and explain why when men and boys are raped, they are usually seen as having been feminized, treated like women and thus rendered shamefully woman-like (Mude, Demirkir 2019)

David the King

King David understands the concept of wooing a lady and hence he did not apply that in the case of Bathsheba. King David after the death of Nabal, husband to Abigail, the beautiful clever woman as described in 1 Samuel 25:40, sent his

servants to go seek for her hand in marriage on his behalf. It states “And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to wife”. The rich widow of Nabal accepted the marriage proposal. Ted Grimsrud (2020) explains that “David’s faithful attitude in his relationship can be seen in the case of Abigail, the beautiful and intelligent wife of Nabal”. When Nabal died in a morally legitimate way, David proposed marriage to her. 1 Samuel 25:39-40, proves that David can indeed put aside his pride and woo a woman in the proper manner. David did not need to have Bathsheba, since she was still legally married. Ted however notes that David did not need to take and grasp. He could wait and trust in God’s timing (Ted Grimsrud, 2020). This implies that David could have waited since Bathsheba’s husband was in the army. He could have waited for him to die a natural death or even in battle before ‘taking’ Bathsheba his wife. Russel L. Meek (2019) notes “the most powerful man in a monarchical society saw a woman he wanted, sent other men to bring her to him, vaginally penetrated her, then murdered her husband to avoid being found out”. Russel L. Meek calls this “Rape”.

David’s Rape

In verse 4 of 2 Samuel 11, David sent his messengers and they ‘took’ from the Hebrew root word לקח ‘laqach’ pronounced ‘law-kakh’ meaning carry away, fetch, seize, takeaway, which denotes ‘force’. It simply means that force can be applied if Bathsheba resist coming. Bathsheba had no choice; she was taken forcefully to meet the King who then exercised his sexual desires by having sexual connections with her. It’s in line with this that Ralf (2021) opines that “Bathsheba is forced to submit to the Kings sexual advances. She doesn’t really have a choice”. Arvind (2017) adds that David’s royal action is governed by powerful verbs such as ‘he saw’ ‘he sent’ ‘he inquired’ ‘he took’ ‘he lay’ indicating rapid and single minded action. McGeough (2018) asserts that “David’s moral failings is usually understood as adulterous rather than rooted in property crimes or sexual aggression”. From verse 4 of 2Samuel 11, David had given the orders to his messengers to fetch Bathsheba, an order they must obey and even if Bathsheba does not want to go with them. The instruction לקח ‘laqach’ meaning to fetch, seize implies a command that must be obeyed. The individual at this point has no will power of saying no. this in fact is the use of force to summon Bathsheba before the

King, who intends to use her for his sexual gratification despite having many wives and concubines at his disposal.

The book of 2Samuel reveals that David uses his position as King to have another man's wife in his bed, and sends her away after sexually satisfying himself. This is seen in verse 4 where the narrator tells us that Bathsheba was purified (clean) from her uncleanness and she returned (Hebrew שׁוּב 'shub'; pronounced 'shoob' meaning turn back, bring home, deliver, relieve, take back, cause to make to turn back) to her house. This means David sent her away after using his position as King obviously to have his way with Bathsheba sexually. Sending her back shows that the King had no marital intentions or love towards Bathsheba. She in fact had no place in the King's heart. McGeough (2018), argues in line that the "author of Samuel does not indicate that David wants Bathsheba for a wife". David (1995) adds that, "the striking feature of the David story is that males are so casual about women and that women are so marginal to the lives of the protagonists.

Re-reading the book of 2Samuel exposes one to the fact that David has no regards for love. This is evident from the way King David took Michal from Paltiel without considering if they both loved each other. It was more of his pride as a King and as a man than love. Not just with Michal, but the way King David collects women for himself making them his wives and concubines as well as the widowed Abigail, wife to late Nabal. This goes a long way to show that King David has no place for love for women. David in 2Samuel 1:26 (KJV) prefers the love he has for Jonathan to that of a woman; this is described in 2 Samuel 1:24 "I am distress for thee, my brother Jonathan very pleasant hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful passing the love of women"

From the biblical account of 2Samuel, we can clearly see that David first commits the crime of invading Bathsheba's privacy by spying on her while she washed herself. This is a total disrespect to Bathsheba's body. Arvind (2017), however notes that "first, David invades Bathsheba's privacy and violates her even before bringing her to his bed". McGeough (2018), agrees in line with Arvind Theodore, when he states that "the King engages in voyeurism by watching Bathsheba bath without her knowledge". David rapes her, gets her pregnant and tries to shift the pregnancy to Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. King David tries to hide this atrocity by bringing back Uriah from the war front so he can lay with his wife Bathsheba, hence passing on the paternity of the child to him. McGeough (2018), notes "in fact the King would prefer that Uriah assume paternity of the unborn child". When this plot failed, King David robbed in Joab in his plot to kill Uriah

the Hittite which became a success just to cover his crimes. In 2Samuel 11:25, David is seen consoling Joab not to blame himself for Uriah's death saying that "the sword devours one, as well as another; make thy battle more strong against the city and overthrow it". Ted-Grimsrud (2020) explains that David enjoys this moment of basking in his overwhelming power and in his sense that he truly is in control of his own fate". David rapes another man's wife, impregnates her and renders her a widow, thereby insulting her dignity as a woman. David felt that sweet victory in his mouth as he tried to talk Joab out of his guilt for partaking in the murder plot. He felt he has won. David had abused the authority and power God (Yahweh) had given him, when he chose him as King over Israel his chosen nation. David's actions from the spying to the adultery, rape to murder were all calculated and well thought out plans. This crime King David committed willfully.

Ralf (2021), analyzed the event thus "Bathsheba is forced to submit to the Kings sexual advances. She doesn't really have a choice. To blame her would be the same as blaming a woman for being raped or blaming a woman a woman under your supervision for instigating a sexual liaison with you. The person with the power here is David, not Bathsheba and David is held solely responsible for the sin by the lord himself (2 Samuel 12:9). Philippe (2019) provided an analysis of women's place in wars in the ancient near east as been determined to a great extent by the fact that there was no law of war. However, some laws allowed wives to remarry if their husbands were made prisoners of war or were considered to have disappeared". King David would have been justified if he had waited for Uriah to fall by the enemy's sword but rather he used this law to cover his tracks by getting married to Bathsheba after he had plotted the death of her husband.

Conclusion

King David understands the concept of wooing a lady and hence he did not apply that in the case of Bathsheba. King David after the death of Nabal, husband to Abigail, the beautiful and clever woman described in 1 Samuel 25:40. David sent his servants to go seek for her hand in marriage on his behalf. It states "And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to wife". The rich widow of Nabal accepted the marriage proposal. Ted-Grimsrud (2020), explains that "David's faithful attitude in his relationship can be seen in the case of Abigail, the beautiful and intelligent wife of Nabal". When Nabal died in a morally legitimate way,

David proposed marriage to her. 1 Samuel 25:39-40 proves that David can indeed put aside his pride and woo a woman in the proper manner just as he did.

David's sin is always considered as adultery and murder, having murdered Uriah. He has always been exempted from the sin of rape especially amongst Christian clerics and Christians at large. David (2020), notes that "over the course of history, this encounter between David and Bathsheba has often been described as adultery which implies sexual consent". However, having examined the biblical narratives and hence the passage, it is evident that the act was actually that of sexual power of power, in other words 'Rape'.

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