

Discussion Questions for
Bathsheba: A Novel
By Jill Eileen Smith

1. The story begins with Bathsheba carrying out her ritual purification with her husband, Uriah, standing guard. How does his adherence to the law and Bathsheba's desire for her husband set the stage for the rest of the story?

2. Bathsheba's husband and father are warriors in King David's elite forces, and often called on to fight the king's battles. How does Uriah treat his position as captain in the king's army? How does Bathsheba respond to yet another war? Have you ever been discontented with your life?

3. Soon into the story something happens in King David's life to cause him grief, making him decide to stay home from the battle. His men do not agree with his decision, while Bathsheba thinks he is entitled to have time to grieve.

Do you agree with Bathsheba's assessment? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to keep working despite trauma in your life? Has there ever been a time when you were not allowed to grieve?

4. Bathsheba meets David as they both stand on their rooftops watching the troops march off to war. David is still grieving and Bathsheba is already mourning the many months Uriah will be away, her loneliness already setting in. When David speaks to her, she can't help feeling drawn to him, but the attraction scares her, though she senses she has nothing to fear from him.

Have you ever entertained a relationship that should have been chaste but you knew deep down could lead to more if you let it? What might Bathsheba have done to walk away sooner than she did?

5. Bathsheba has a conversation with Uriah in which she realizes that like her father, Uriah expects her to blindly obey the men in authority over her. How does this attitude contribute to her future temptation? Have you ever faced a situation where you were expected to obey without thinking, without considering the consequences or whether the thing was right or wrong?

6. Uriah is protective of Bathsheba because she is beautiful and because he fears losing her, much as her father protected her as a child. But they carry their protection farther than she would like, making her feel stifled and imprisoned.

How does over-protectiveness tend to backfire? What is it about human nature that rebels against being emotionally smothered?

7. War comes again and Bathsheba pouts about Uriah's leaving. He confronts her about her attitude, then storms out and eventually leaves for battle without further discussion.

Is there ever a good time to walk away without resolution to a problem? How did Bathsheba's attitude make Uriah feel? Do you think she was being selfish or just blinded by her loneliness? How would having a child have changed the dynamics of their relationship?

8. When spring came again, so did war. This time David had taken more concubines to help assuage his grief, and stayed home a second time. He is restless and moody and dissatisfied until he sees Bathsheba bathing in her courtyard.

How did he react to what he saw? Why do you think he made the decision he did rather than walk away?

9. Bathsheba obeys David's summons, feeling trapped the minute she enters his rooms, yet drawn to his wooing her. How have her past feelings made her vulnerable for this moment? Could she have done anything different to guard her heart?

10. After only one night with the king, Bathsheba discovers she is pregnant. David handles the situation in all the wrong ways, committing some heinous sins.

What might the outcome have been had he acted more nobly? Should he have risked his throne to tell the truth? Have you ever been in a situation that you thought would be improved by lying?

11. Of course, all of the king's plans do not turn out as he'd hoped, and by the time the child is born, God steps in to get David to see his sin. Nathan the prophet shows up and tells David a story. How does the use of story help David see what he has done? How do you think God uses story today?

12. The death of the child devastates both David and Bathsheba. Even after God forgives them and gives them Solomon, they never quite escape the sword, that God said would never depart from their house. What consequences immediately followed Solomon's birth? What trouble arises in David's own house?

13. Absalom's rebellion was one of the biggest blows David suffered in all of his adult life. He mourned this son's loss like no other. Have you ever known the pain of separation from one you loved? Have you ever blamed yourself for the choices of an adult child? Was David directly responsible for what Absalom did? How can we learn from David and Absalom?

14. Bathsheba has five sons with David (four that live). What does this tell us about their relationship in comparison to how many children David had with his other wives? Do you think David loved Bathsheba?

15. In the book, when Solomon is ten, David begins sharing plans with him regarding the building of the temple. David has promised Bathsheba that Solomon will sit on his throne when he is gone. Why then, do you think David waited so long to name Solomon king? Do you ever put off important things rather than face them when you should?

16. Near the end of David's life, after Solomon is finally reigning at David's side, Bathsheba realizes that she will not have David forever. What emotions do you think she felt, knowing David's days were numbered on this earth? Do you think she lived with regrets or in the strength of God's forgiveness and David's love? What did you learn most from Bathsheba's story?



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