

God's Judgment on Israel Because of David's Sin of Pride

2 Samuel 24

In this closing chapter of 2 Samuel, we read of God's judgment on Israel because David's sin of pride.

2 Samuel 24 - *"Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people." 3 And Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?" 4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army. Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel.*

5 And they crossed over the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the town which is in the midst of the ravine of Gad, and toward Jazer. 6 Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim Hodshi; they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon; 7 and they came to the stronghold of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites. Then they went out to South Judah as far as Beersheba. 8 So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. 9 Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king. And there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

10 And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."

11 Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 "Go and tell David, 'Thus says the LORD: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you."' 13 So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me."

14 And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

15 So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till the appointed time. From Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men of the people died. 16 And when the anger stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

17 Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."

18 And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." 19 So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded. 20 Now Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming toward him. So Araunah went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. 21 Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people."

22 Now Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever seems good to him. Look, here are oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements and the yokes of the oxen for wood. 23 All these, O king, Araunah has given to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you."

24 Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel."

Background Notes

Verse 1: "*Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel...*" Most likely the time meant by "again" or "former time" (in some translations) was in 2 Samuel 21, when the Lord judged Israel for dishonoring their covenant with the Gibeonites. Here in 2 Samuel 24, the reason for the Lord's anger is not given, but there is a good possibility that it was national pride on the part of the whole nation, a pride that prompted David to assess the military strength of the nation. This census was not God's Will, and even Joab (of all people!) advised against it. Joab recognized that in taking this military census, David indicated he was trusting in military forces and strength for protection rather than trusting the Lord for protection. So this census was done because of national and personal pride. The Lord did not direct it, but the Lord used this occasion to judge and discipline Israel for their national pride.

Verse 1 indicates that the Lord moved David to number Israel, whereas the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 21 says that Satan moved David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1 says, "*Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.*" But 2 Samuel 24 indicates that God moved David to number Israel. This is very similar to what we have in 1 Samuel 16:14 where we read, "*But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him.*"

These apparently conflicting passages are not a contradiction in the Bible. God is not the source of evil, and He doesn't induce anyone to do evil. James 1:13 says, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*" However, under His sovereign will, God allows evil, and He permits people and evil spirits to exercise their wills - even though this involves evil. Thus, 2 Samuel 24:1 can say that God moved David to number Israel in the sense that God permitted David to be tempted to number his fighting forces.

Ephesians 1:11 says, “...according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...” God works all things according to the counsel of His will - God works out everything in accordance with His sovereign will. But the direct cause of David taking the census was Satan taking advantage of David’s own sin of national pride.

Doctrinal Points

1. The sin of David’s pride was very serious.

When David realized that he had sinned, he did the right thing. He went before the Lord and confessed and repented. Verse 10: “*And David’s heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”*”

Are you willing to say that when the Lord convicts you of sin? Are you willing to confess, “I have acted very foolishly”? That’s hard to say, even to the Lord, but it is a sign of true confession. God graciously forgave David – but, as we’ve seen already in our studies of 2 Samuel, there are consequences to forgiven sin. God disciplines His children. Hebrews 12:6 says, “*The Lord disciplines those He loves, and chastens everyone He accepts as a son.*”

In His grace, God let David choose his own punishment – very unusual in Scripture! The choices were three years of famine, three months of military defeat, or three days of pestilence or plague. David chose the three days of plague. He didn’t select the plague because it was shorter, but because it put David more directly in the hands of the Lord. David knew that the Lord was a God of mercy. Famines don’t show mercy and enemy armies don’t show mercy.

Notice also that David selected the discipline that would directly affect him personally, and put him in the danger of death. Kings don’t suffer like the people in times of famine, and kings can have their armies fight their battles, but kings can’t escape a plague. David knew that he was the cause of the problem, and he was willing to suffer the consequences even as a substitute. “*Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father’s house” (v17).*”

Throughout Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, 70,000 people died as a result of David’s sin of pride. Many in the nation were also guilty of the sin of national pride, but David was the king. He carried a greater responsibility, and so do leaders today. The sin of pride always affects others, and it always has serious consequences. The sin of David’s pride was very serious.

2. The site of David’s sacrifice is very significant.

Verse 18-19: “*And Gad came that day to David and said to him, “Go up, and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded.*”

There’s a wonderful picture of salvation in verses 18-25. David’s confession and repentance of his sin was not all that was necessary in order to stop the plague. A sacrifice on the altar was necessary. Only then did God answer prayer, and

only then was the plague of judgment stopped. In the same way, it is only because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that we can be free from the wrath of God. In John 3:36 the Lord Jesus said that God's wrath remains upon those who refuse to believe: "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God remains on him.*" It is only because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that God can forgive our sins and save us when we come to Him and repent of our sins.

The site of David's sacrifice is also significant, because the threshing floor that David bought from Araunah the Jebusite became the building site of Solomon's Temple. 2 Chronicles 3:1 - "*Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.*" So, the site of David's sacrifice was Mount Moriah.

There is a very good possibility that this was the very site where Abraham brought Isaac to the place of sacrifice - another great picture of salvation. Genesis 22:2 - "*Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'*" So the site of David's sacrifice may have been the very same place where Abraham brought Isaac. It was in Jerusalem, possibly on a ridge of Mount Moriah, where our Lord was sacrificed. So, the site of David's sacrifice is very significant. Solomon built the beautiful Temple of the Lord on the site where David sacrificed, and this is the site where the Temple stood at the time of our Lord's earthly ministry. In addition, this will also be the site of the future Temple during our Lord's Kingdom reign on this earth. The site of David's sacrifice is very significant.

Practical Application

Let's not give offerings to the Lord that cost us nothing!

In verse 24, David insisted on buying the site of the sacrifice from Araunah the Jebusite. Araunah was willing to donate the land and the oxen for sacrifice, but David refused. He said, "*I will not give offerings to the Lord which cost me nothing.*"

What about us? Do we try to offer the Lord things that cost us nothing? Do we offer "leftover" time for Christian service? Do we offer token contributions to Christian ministries? Do we donate worn-out stuff to those in need, mostly for the purpose of tax write-offs? What kind of sacrifice is that?

Let's not give offerings to the Lord that cost us nothing!