

2 Samuel 24
May 26, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK: We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. When you have sinned, have you ever tried to discern or struggled with whether you sinned because Satan tempted you vs you sinned by your own free will, or whether God in His sovereignty allowed you to sin to accomplish His purpose for you? How do you determine the cause for sinning? Or can you?? [Let people engage]

Transition: Today's text raises the same question I just posed. We are going to read in Chp 24 that the "anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah." We will also read this same account, which can be found in I Chron 21. You will notice in verse 1 that it's Satan who incited David to take a census.

So... Who or what caused David to sin in this passage: God's sovereign decree, Satan's temptation, or David's free will (I Chron 21:1). Let's read the text and see if we can get close to the answer.

BOOK:

David Counts the Fighting Men

24 Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah."

² So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, "Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are."

³ But Joab replied to the king, "May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?"

⁴ The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel.

⁵ After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aroer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer. ⁶ They went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, and on to Dan Jaan and around toward Sidon. ⁷ Then they went toward the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah.

⁸ After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

⁹ Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand.

¹⁰ David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

¹¹ Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: ¹² "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.' "

¹³ So Gad went to David and said to him, “Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.”

¹⁴ David said to Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.”

¹⁵ So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. ¹⁶ When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.” The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁷ When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, “I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family.”

David Builds an Altar

¹⁸ On that day Gad went to David and said to him, “Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” ¹⁹ So David went up, as the LORD had commanded through Gad. ²⁰ When Araunah looked and saw the king and his men coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.

²¹ Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?”

“To buy your threshing floor,” David answered, “so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped.”

²² Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. ²³ O king, Araunah gives all this to the king.” Araunah also said to him, “May the LORD your God accept you.”

²⁴ But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them. ²⁵ David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Do we realize the high cost of sinning? A true confession is more than a quick prayer and a quoting of 1 John 1:9! True confession involves facing sin honestly and obeying God's Word regardless of the price we must pay.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (2 Sam 24). Victor Books.

You will want to read 1 Chronicles 21, the parallel account of this great sin in David's life. Here is another example of God permitting Satan to work so that the purposes of the Lord might be fulfilled. See Luke 22:31–34.

I. Sin (24:1–9)

What lay behind David's desire for a national census? Probably it was pride: he had won a number of great victories (1 Chron. 18–20) and perhaps wanted to bask in the glory of success. There was certainly nothing wrong with a census, since the people had often been numbered during their national history; but we must keep in mind that a census that praised men would never glorify God.

Another factor to consider is Ex. 30:11–16. In connection with a census was the matter of the "redemption money" that each one was to give, for this money was a reminder that the people

were the Lord's purchased possession. Exodus 30:12 warns that God would plague the nation if the people ignored giving the redemption money, and this is just what happened.

God gave David nearly ten months to change his mind and avoid discipline (v. 8). God even used the wise counsel of Joab to discourage him, but David would not listen. It is too bad that God's children sometimes become stubborn in heart and insist on their own way.

David's sin was not a hasty thing; he carried it out with cool, calculated precision. He was rebelling against God! There is an interesting series of contrasts between this sin and his sin with Bathsheba: (1) this was a sin of the spirit (pride) while the other was a sin of the flesh; (2) here he acted with deliberate persistence, while his sin with Bathsheba came as the result of the sudden overwhelming desires of the flesh; (3) this sin involved the nation, and 70,000 people died; his other sin was a family matter, with 4 people dying. (4) Yet in both sins, God gave David time to repent, but he waited too long.

We may not think that pride and rebellion against God's Word are serious sins, but in David's life they produced greater sorrow and tragedy than did his adultery. We must beware of sins "of the flesh and of the spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1).

II. Suffering (24:10–17)

"The wages of sin is death." Note that David was convicted in his heart before the judgment fell. He was certainly honest with himself and with the Lord, but his conviction and repentance came too late. In 12:13, David said, "I have sinned," but here he says, "I have sinned *greatly*." From a human point of view, numbering the people does not seem a greater sin than adultery and murder; yet from God's point of view, taking the census was a sin greater in its disobedience and consequence. Jesus, when on earth, was forgiving toward the publicans and sinners but severe with the proud and rebellious. Certainly, sins both of the flesh and of the spirit are evil, and a person should not be involved in either one, but we dare not underestimate the awful results of pride and stubborn disobedience.

God permitted David to choose his own discipline, and his choice showed the compassion of his heart. ("Seven years of famine" in v. 13 should be "three years" to parallel the three months and three days of the other two punishments.) David chose to fall into the hands of his merciful Lord rather than into the hands of men. At 6:00 A.M. God's angel came and began to plague the people. By the time of the evening sacrifice (3:00 P.M.) the angel had slain 70,000 people with a plague. David and his elders saw the judging angel, and David immediately interceded for the people. "These sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand be against me!" However, we must remember that God had a definite cause against the entire nation (24:1) and was using David's sin as the opportunity to judge the people. Perhaps God was punishing the nation for its rebellion against David when many of them followed Absalom.

There is a practical warning here for those in places of authority: the higher the office, the greater the influence for good or for evil. In Lev. 4 we see that, if the high priest sinned, he was to bring a bullock for an offering (v. 3), the same sacrifice that God required if the whole congregation sinned (vv. 13–14)! David's sin involved the whole nation this time, just as his "family sin" had involved his entire household.

III. Sacrifice (24:18–25)

Two factors were involved in the halting of the judgment: the mercy of the Lord (v. 16) and the confession and sacrifice of the sinner (vv. 17ff). God sent His servant a message to build an altar

at the place where he had seen the angel, the threshing floor of Araunah (or Ornan). David and his elders went immediately to the site and settled the purchase: he paid 600 shekels of gold for “the place” (the entire area, 1 Chron. 21:25) and 50 shekels of silver for the oxen and the threshing floor (2 Sam. 24:24). Ornan would have freely given the whole thing to his king, but David would not accept it. He would not give the Lord another man’s sacrifice! A cheap sacrifice is worse than no sacrifice at all. This is a good principle for us to follow in our own Christian walk.

David immediately offered the oxen as burnt offerings of dedication to the Lord, and the shedding of the blood took care of the sins. Second Chronicles 3:1 informs us that this very same area became the site for Solomon’s temple. God was able to turn the curse into a blessing! It is interesting to note that Solomon was born to Bathsheba, who had been involved in David’s adultery; and yet Solomon became the next king and actually built the temple on the piece of ground associated with David’s greater sin of numbering the people. Such is the amazing working of the grace of God! Certainly we ought not to “do evil that good may come from it” (Rom. 3:8), but we can rest in the confidence that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

Let us note some practical lessons from this chapter:

A. We never outgrow temptation.

David was not an inexperienced youth when he committed this sin! Had he been “watching and praying” he would not have entered into temptation and sin so easily.

B. God graciously gives time to repent.

He gave David more than nine months to deal with his sins and make matters right. “Seek the Lord while He may be found.”

C. Sins of the spirit do great damage.

All sin is wicked and should be avoided, to be sure, but we must realize that the Bible repeatedly condemns stubborn pride. Once David got on his evil course, he was too proud to turn around. His predecessor, King Saul, made the same mistake. We may not be guilty of adultery and murder, but a hard heart and a proud look will lead to perhaps greater evils.

D. Our sins involve others.

Seventy thousand people died because David disobeyed the Lord.

E. True confession is a costly thing.

Do we realize the high cost of sinning? A true confession is more than a quick prayer and a quoting of 1 John 1:9! True confession involves facing sin honestly and obeying God’s Word regardless of the price we must pay.

F. God will forgive and bring blessing.

Let us put ourselves into the hands of the Lord, for great are His mercies toward us!

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 2 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 481-482) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

C. David's sin in taking the census (chap. 24)

24:1–3. It is impossible to determine the date of this episode from 2 Samuel alone, but the parallel version in 1 Chronicles 21 places it just prior to David's instructions to Solomon about building the temple (1 Chron. 21:28–22:19). The census must have come late in David's reign, and may have been part of the plan of dynastic succession in anticipation of Solomon's coming to power.

For reasons not stated, **the LORD** was angry **against Israel** (the **again** of 2 Sam. 24:1 may refer to 21:1), and **He** led **David** to command that a census be taken. In 1 Chronicles 21:1 this motivation is attributed to (lit.) “a Satan” (or adversary). This is no contradiction for the Lord had simply allowed Satan to prompt David to an improper course of action in order that Israel might be punished and that David might be instructed. This is similar to the Lord's permitting Satan to trouble Job (Job 1:12; 2:6) and His allowing an evil spirit to torment Saul (1 Sam. 16:14; see comments there). In any case, the Lord Himself did not incite David to do evil for “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone” (James 1:13).

The reasons for David's desire for a census are not clear either, though the fact that he only had military **men** counted (2 Sam. 24:2, 9) suggests that he was interested in determining his military strength. And herein lay the sin—he probably did this so he could boast in human might. This may be implied in Joab's query as to **why** the census was to be undertaken. God was able, **Joab** said, to **multiply** their **troops** as much as necessary, so why did David feel the need to assess his strength?

24:4–9. David prevailed, however, and sent census takers throughout the realm. Beginning in the Transjordan they **went** counterclockwise north **to Dan Jaan** (a variation of Dan), then west and southwest of **Sidon** and **Tyre**, throughout the plains and valleys of Canaanite and Hivite (Horites or Hurrians) population, and south **to Beersheba**. Finally, after **nine months and 20 days**, the report was given; there were **800,000** eligible fighting **men in Israel** and **500,000 in Judah** (v. 9). The figures in 1 Chronicles are 1,100,000 men in Israel and 470,000 in Judah, but the chronicler wrote that the Levites and Benjamites were not included (1 Chron. 21:5–6). The reconciliation of the data may lie in the possibility that 1,100,000 describes the grand total for Israel including the standing army which consisted of 12 units of 24,000 men each (288,000, 1 Chron. 27:1–15) plus 12,000 especially attached to Jerusalem and the chariot cities (2 Chron. 1:14). These 300,000 subtracted from 1,100,000 would yield the 800,000 figure in 2 Samuel 24:9. Also the chronicler may not have included the 30,000-man standing army of Judah (6:1) whereas they were included in chapter 24. This would raise the 470,000 total of Chronicles to the 500,000 of Samuel. This is only one solution, but with so little information available as to how the sums were obtained nothing further can be said with certainty.

24:10–25. After **David** received the report, he realized his sin of pride and self-sufficiency and confessed this sin (which he called **a very foolish thing**) **to the LORD** (1 Chron. 21:7 points out that the Lord punished Israel, thus indicating the evil of the census). The Lord then sent **Gad**, a **prophet**, to **David** with a list of **three** calamities from which he could **choose** and by which the Lord would register His displeasure and purge out the evil. The choices were **three years of**

famine ... three months of enemy pursuit, and three days of pestilence (2 Sam. 24:13). (Though the Heb. reads “seven” years of famine, 1 Chron. 21:12, probably a better-preserved text, reads “three,” as the NIV has it.) **David** chose the third option, throwing himself on the **mercy** of God (2 Sam. 24:14).

The result was a **plague** which took the lives of **70,000** people. When **Jerusalem** itself was threatened, **the LORD** intervened and commanded His angelic destroyer to desist. **David** then confessed his own personal sin and urged **the LORD** to spare His innocent people. Then, in order to make proper restitution and atonement, **David** arranged to construct **an altar to the LORD**. **Gad** told him that it must be built **on the threshing floor of Araunah**, a citizen of Jerusalem, since it was there that **the angel** had been commanded to cease his destruction of the city (v. 16).

According to well-founded tradition, this **threshing floor**, a wide, smooth, ledge-like surface, was on Mount Moriah, just outside the northern wall of David’s Jerusalem. But David had no right to it because it was owned by a citizen. When **Araunah** learned of David’s desire (v. 21), however, he was willing not only to give the threshing floor **to the king** but also to provide the **wood** and sacrifices needed (v. 22). To this gracious offer David could only give a negative response. How could he **sacrifice to the LORD** what **cost** him **nothing**? That would be a denial of the very meaning of sacrifice. **Araunah** therefore sold him the **threshing floor and oxen for 50 shekels of silver** (the 600 shekels of gold in 1 Chron. 21:25 includes, however, “the site,” more than just the threshing floor). Fifty shekels was about 1 1/2 pounds of silver. The silver David paid was only for the oxen and the threshing floor, and the 600 shekels (15 pounds of gold) mentioned in 1 Chronicles 21:25 was for the lot of land surrounding the threshing floor.

Having obtained the site, **David built the altar**, offered the sacrifices, and interceded on behalf of his people. God heard and **answered**, and **the land** was healed of **the plague**. This was where Abraham had offered Isaac (Gen. 22:2). And on this same spot Solomon later constructed his magnificent temple (1 Chron. 22:1; 2 Chron. 3:1).

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 131-132). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

David’s Pride (24:1–25). The final episode of the appendix concerns the plague the Lord brought against Israel because of David’s sin. It parallels the beginning story of the appendix where Israel suffered famine because of Saul’s sin (21:1–14). The specific reason for God’s anger at Israel is unstated. The Lord, however, used David’s census to chasten the people by plague. In the parallel passage (1 Chr. 21:1) the author explained that the immediate cause for David’s sin was the work of Satan.

David’s taking of the census was an indication of his pride and self-reliance. In the law the taking of a census required an atonement price to avert plague (Exod. 30:11–16). God instructed the prophet Gad to announce His judgment on Israel. God presented David a choice of three punishments—famine, plague, or war. These three sanctions were the curses God threatened to bring upon Israel for breaking the covenant (Deut. 28). David wisely placed himself at the mercy of God and not the temperament of man. The Lord punished Israel by a devastating plague. David confessed that he was guilty for misleading the sheep of Israel.

To make atonement for Israel, the prophet Gad instructed David to build an altar at the threshing floor of Araunah. There David had seen the avenging angel carry out the deadly plague. He would later choose this site for the building of the temple (1 Chr. 22:1).

Araunah offered to give the floor to the king, but David knew that acceptable atonement required a price. He built the altar, offered sacrifices, and prayed in behalf of his people. The Lord acknowledged David's intercession, and the plague ceased.

Ethical and Theological Significance. David's story, like Romans 7:7–25, speaks to the Christian's experience of sin. David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). Like Paul, he could have said, "In my inner being I delight in God's law" (Rom. 7:22). But like Paul, David saw "another law at work in the members of [his] body, . . . making [him] a prisoner of the law of sin" (7:23). David coveted Uriah's wife, and "sin sprang to life" (7:9). With Uriah's murder, David's sin became "utterly sinful" (7:13).

Nathan's parable roused David's moral outrage at his sin (2 Sam. 12). Today Scripture functions like Nathan's tale to help us see what we are really like. David saw and experienced heartbreak over his sin.

David suffered short- and long-term consequences of his sin. His sin did not, however, thwart God's ultimate, saving purpose for and through him. "In all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28). God worked through the lives of David and Bathsheba to give Israel its next king (Solomon) and, in time, its Messiah (Matt. 1:6). God continues to work through the lives of repentant sinners. "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25).

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 2 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 192-193). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Census and the Plague (2 Sam. 24:1–25)

The passage—For some reason, not fully disclosed, God was angry with Israel. This chapter tells us God moved David to number Israel. First Chronicles 21 states that Satan provoked David to number Israel. Sometimes humans have a desire to do something which Satan leads them to do, and God allows them to do what they want to in order to reveal to them that they are wrong. The best interpretation here seems to be that the census was wrong. David's desire was so strong, God told him to go ahead.

Even Joab advised David against the census. The people did not want to be enlisted for further military duty.

After David realized he had sinned in taking the census, he repented. God gave David three choices: seven years of famine, three months fleeing from his enemies, or three days of pestilence. David threw himself on the mercy of God and chose the plague.

Thousands of people were dying. God's mercy moved him to stop the plague. David begged God to let him alone bear the punishment.

Gad, the prophet of God, instructed David to build an altar to God on the site of the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite. David sought to buy it from its owner. Araunah offered to give it to David along with animals for the sacrifice. David replied, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing." He insisted on purchasing the site at a proper price.

Truth for today—One of the truly fine stewardship illustrations of the Bible is found in this passage. All too many people want to give as little as they can to God. They are willing for others to pay for the cost of the house of the Lord and the program of God's kingdom. A true Christian will not allow others to pay for his share of the support of the work of the Lord. He finds joy in sacrifice.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 24). Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan.**

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