

## **“An Altar to God”**

### **2 Samuel 23:1-24:25 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 – 22:19**

In our lesson this week, David’s greatness and weakness was once again presented so graphically for us. Today we’ll review illustrations of devotion, leadership and loyalty. We’ll witness God’s mercy and see God’s plan unfold as He uses sin and failure for His purposes. We’ll see that through:

#### **David’s CENSUS**

- Regardless of our age or how long we walk with God, we will never outgrow temptation and because God loves us, His instructions and commands are to be obeyed.

#### **David’s CHOICE**

- There are consequences to sin.

#### **David’s CONFESSION**

- There was genuine sorrow and regret over his sins and a repentant heart was revealed.

#### **David’s CONSECRATION**

- The property on Mount Moriah would become the most historical site in all Israel, and in the future, in all the world.

#### **David’s COURAGEOUS MEN**

- God can take *anyone* and turn them into *someone* in His kingdom.

#### **David’s CONSTRUCTION**

- A magnificent house for the Lord will be built by Solomon.

2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 contain parallel accounts of the same event - God’s displeasure with Israel and with David. 1 Chronicles states it was *Satan* who incited David to sin by taking a census, and 2 Samuel says *God* moved David to do so.

When we address Scripture that appears contradictory we must remember explanations are not always provided for every event and every act of God. We *do* know however, that **God is perfect and without sin (Psalms 18:30; Matthew 5:48). God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13)**

We must realize different authors often record the same events differently. For example: the four gospels are written by four authors each with their own backgrounds and writing styles. Because the author of 2 Samuel knew that nothing happens outside of God’s will, he wrote that *God* caused David to sin because it was God’s *will* to *allow* David to sin.

God allowed David to be tempted by Satan because God saw something in David's heart that needed to be exposed. God takes our free-will decisions and uses them for His purposes.

In this account,

**Satan *precipitated* the sin**

**David *performed* the sin**

**God *permitted* the sin**

Scholars believe God was angry with Israel because they rebelled against King David – *twice*; they followed Absalom, then Sheba. Lives were lost because of their rebellions and David went through great struggles to gain the kingdom back.

What was David's motivation for counting his fighting men? Many believe it was a "sin of pride." In his book, *David, A Man after the Heart of God*, Theodore Epp wrote, "This census was rooted in pride – it glorified manpower, not God power."

Yet, there was *another* problem with David's census.

In the Book of Exodus, God gave Israel regulations about census taking and if the regulations weren't followed, there would be punishment for disobeying. David did not obey those regulations. God has reasons for every restriction, for every law, and they must be obeyed, even if we don't understand them.

Perhaps we can relate this to our experience as a parent:

When one of our children grabs a fork and reaches to put it into the tiny slits in the wall that seem perfectly suited for that fork, how do we respond? "Now, sweetie, don't do that. Forks don't go into a electrical socket." When the reply inevitably comes, "But why Mom; why Dad?" How often do we go into specifics? "Well, sweetie, you see at the subatomic level there are tiny particles called electrons jumping between orbits. This creates what is called an alternating current that travels through the wires in the wall. And if that current enters your body it disrupts your central nervous system, burning your skin and possibly stopping your heart."

Try that on a two or three-year-old and see if it does the trick. There *will* be a day when they understand electricity enough to know why fork-in-socket is a bad idea. But for now we must say to them, "Stop! Don't do that!" We love our children and want to protect them and while they're young we know much more than they do.

David's census was unauthorized because he didn't obey God's rules laid down in Exodus 30. David's census was a military census to see how big his army was. Warren Wiersbe commented that,

**"Sometimes God's greatest judgment is simply to let us have our own way. "**

God said there would be punishment for violating His laws in taking a census. Hebrews 12:6 tells us why, "For the LORD disciplines those He loves, and He punishes each one He accepts as His child."

Let's go now to the actual census-taking event. Joab, David's general, was loyal for sure, but more often he was ungodly and self-willed. If *Joab* felt the census was wrong, it probably was *very wrong*. He told David, "God can give you *multitudes* of troops. Why do you need to know how many you have? Israel will be punished for it."

Well, the boss is the boss, or rather, the king is the king, and David overruled the protests of Joab *and* his officers and they spend almost 10 months counting soldiers. But Joab didn't fully obey David. He didn't count the tribes of Levi and Benjamin because David's order disgusted him. Joab's parents should have read James Dobson's book, *The Strong Willed Child*.

Did you notice the difference in these chapters as to the number of fighting men? Scholars address the difference by studying all Scripture, which can clarify passages. Dr. Charles Ryrie offers one solution: "The 800,000 from Israel in 2 Samuel may not have included the 300,000 listed in 1 Chronicles 27, which would make the total 1,100,000. The 470,000 in Judah may not have included the 30,000 in 2 Samuel 6:1, which would bring the total to 500,000." Learned scholars of Scripture feel that with the little information that's available on the count, nothing can be said with certainty.

David, the man after God's own heart, was faithful, but he was not sinless. When he *did* sin though, his heart was sensitive to it. In his book *David*, Chuck Swindoll wrote, "Even though David was a man after God's heart he wasn't perfect. But to the end of his days he had a sensitive heart for God. His heart troubled him. The Hebrew term is *nakah*. It means to be attacked, or assaulted. In other words, deep inside David's inner man was a disturbing reminder of God's displeasure in what he had done."

The fighting men were counted, David, retired for the night and in the morning, Gad, the Lord's prophet, delivered David's wake up call. David was told he must decide which of

three options would be his punishment. Each was horrific. Each would reduce the number of people in Israel.

### **DAVID'S CHOICE**

3 years of famine. Fields would burn and blow away; streams would no longer carry water; starvation and despair in every home would force the people to depend on neighboring nations for food. *Man is not merciful.*

3 months of war. Many Israelites would be killed - the majority from David's military. *Man is not merciful.*

3 days of a plague. The land would be filled with corpses, wailing and tears.

David chose God's hand to administer punishment because he knew punishment by God would include mercy. How well David knew his God! **Psalm 86:5 "For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy to all them that call on you."**

David dreamt of numbers for nearly 10 months, but not *this* number. 70,000 people died within hours, in a widespread outbreak of disease.

The plague, carried out by a destroying angel with a sword, reached Jerusalem ready to continue destruction there as well. As the angel stood at a threshing floor owned by a man named Araunah, his arm raised to bring it down upon the City of David, God intervened and temporarily halted the pending devastation. The Lord said, "Enough! Withdraw your hand!"

It must have been frightening seeing the angelic destroyer, standing in the air between heaven and earth, his sword stretched out over Jerusalem. David and his elders, clothed in sackcloth - the apparel of grief and humility - fell face down into the dirt.

David didn't put the blame for his sin on any person or any circumstance. He told God, **"I gave the order. I have done wrong."** David confessed and asked the Lord to spare his innocent people and to pour out His anger on *him* instead. Ever the shepherd, David was willing to lay down his life for the sheep and suffer in their place. Does that sound familiar?

Yet, the people were not as innocent as David thought. They didn't order the census, but were guilty of their *own* sin – rebellion against God's chosen king.

The mighty angel ordered David to build an altar on Araunah's threshing floor, while the angel waited with his sword out of its sheath - upraised – ready to strike. God's punishment was on hold until atonement was offered.

David went up to the threshing floor located on a large, flat, space of land *on top* of the hill, Mount Moriah. On a threshing floor, grain is winnowed by a wood threshing sledge, pulled by oxen harnessed with wood yokes.

Araunah saw David and his officials coming up the hill and asked why he had come to see him. David told Araunah he wanted to buy his threshing floor to build an altar to the Lord so the plague on his people may be stopped. Again the shepherd was concerned for his sheep. David tells Araunah, "Name your price."

Araunah told David he could have *everything* - his land, his cattle for the sacrifice, his wood threshing sledges and yokes for the altar, even his wheat for the grain offering - everything he needed to offer a sacrifice to God - *free of charge*. David could worship God at Araunah's expense.

David refused and told Araunah, "No. I insist on paying full price. I won't give to the Lord what is *yours*."

**"It isn't a true sacrifice if it costs *me* nothing."** Had David accepted Araunah's offer, it would have been *Araunah's* sacrifice, not David's.

For what and how we sacrifice to the Lord, God looks at the heart and David had a heart for God. David's heart said, "I won't skimp. I won't cheat God."

David bought the threshing floor, oxen and wood instruments. He also bought the field around the threshing floor and the hill on which it sat. David had *big plans* for that location!

The scent of David's burnt offering was a sweet fragrance to heaven and the Lord stopped the plague. The angel's sword returned to its sheath. There were still 70,000 fresh graves in Israel, but in God's mercy, Jerusalem would not be devastated.

Araunah's threshing floor was a special piece of land. But before we hear why, let's review what chapter 23 of 2 Samuel tells us about leadership and courage.

The last *prophetic* or *inspired* words in the opening verses may have been spoken by King David himself, or, as scholars believe, were recorded by the prophets Nathan and Gad. They were written as a poem; a psalm; a wise saying. We read about David's humble roots, that he was Israel's poet-psalmist, and that God anointed him, and because the Spirit of the Lord spoke through David, he was also a prophet.

The writer depicts David as God's king – righteous, with the utmost reverence for God and who had an *everlasting covenant* with God – a covenant *created* by God, protected and eternal.

Then there is a sharp contrast at the end of the psalm between godly rulers and godless people.

Unlike a righteous and God-fearing king, godless people are useless - like thorny plants with spires pointing in every direction, only to be handled with a spear. They will be tossed aside and ultimately burned like a pile of rubbish.

The chapter concludes with a list of devoted soldiers who performed heroic feats of courage for their godly leader.

What is courage?

A woman and her husband interrupted their vacation to go to a dentist. The woman told the dentist, "I want a tooth pulled, and I don't want Novocain because I'm in a big hurry." The dentist was quite impressed. "You certainly are a courageous woman," he said. "Ok then, which tooth is it?" The woman turned to her husband and said, "Show him your tooth, dear."

Offering up others to be courageous was not like David's Mighty Men.

When preparing this lecture, each time I read the words "Mighty Men", I reflected on a cartoon from childhood - Mighty Mouse - who would sing, "Here I come to save the day!" Well, David's mighty men are no mice!

David's courageous men began their relationship with David when he was a fugitive fleeing from King Saul. They were a group of discontented, distressed, debtors, yet this motley crew of warriors accomplished supernatural and stunning victories over Israel's enemies in spite of incredible odds. It was through these men, God brought victory to David and to Israel.

These brave soldiers had great skill, enormous courage and immense devotion for David for whom they fought valiantly. There was a greatness - a mightiness about David that inspired these men to be the same.

These exceptional warriors are divided into three groups. The most highly regarded were called, *The Three*. We'll call them the A-Team. The second group - another three mighty men - we'll call them the B-Team and the third group were called, *The Thirty*.

The events surrounding the A-Team lead scholars to believe they were David's bravest and strongest. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Some people are like tea bags. You have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are." Let's meet David's strongest comrades.

Josheb-Bashebeth was the chief of the elite *Three* – the A-Team. He slew 800 of the enemy at one time. That’s a lot of slewing. I love the King James Version when it uses the words *slew* and *smite*. Those words say so much more than just “killed.”

Eleazar was the second of *The Three*. In a battle against the Philistines, after the Israelites fled in fear, he stayed and fought, smiting the Philistines until his hand was weary with smiting, holding onto his sword so tight and for so long the muscles in his hand just locked onto it.

Shammah was the third of *The Three*. He too engaged in a battle with the Philistines who had gathered in a field of *lentils*. Again, Israel’s troops fled. But Shammah stood in the field and defended it, which made some farmer very happy. Why would Shammah risk his life for legumes? Because the farmland was the Israelite’s food.

These three mighty men did not fight on their own power. The Lord brought about their great victories.

Scholars have differing opinions as to whether or not the following was accomplished by the A-Team or by the B-Team. Regardless, this is still one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible and stresses the courage and deep loyalty these men had.

The circumstances may have been like this: David and his men were in a cave hiding from the Philistines - probably soon after David was anointed king over Israel.

It was hot and David was thirsty. David may have been reminiscing aloud about the water in a Bethlehem well he used to drink from as a boy. David may have said, to no one in particular, “I remember a well just outside the city of Bethlehem that had the best tasting water. That water sure sounds good right about now.” He didn’t realize three of his soldiers were close enough to hear him, loyal enough to make his wish their command, and brave enough to please him at any cost.

These brave men left the safety of the cave, traveled 12 miles through Philistine lines, collected some of the well water, fought their way back and, without even a thermos, brought the Bethlehem water to David. They risked their lives because they were devoted to this man of God.

They tell David, “We got this water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem – the well you told us about. Here, this water is for you, O king.” Can you imagine the thoughts that went through David’s mind when he was handed the water and realized what these three brave men had done? They risked their lives - for *him*.

When David looked into the cup, he didn't see water; he saw the blood of the three men who risked their lives to satisfy his thirst. To drink the water would cheapen their brave deed. The water was too valuable, too precious to drink. He treated it as a special offering to the Lord and poured it onto the ground as if to say, "I'm not worthy of drinking this water. Only the *Lord* is worthy of your sacrifice."

David's action didn't incite their anger, but their admiration, for it was not an act of waste, but an act of worship. He poured it onto the ground not because it was trash, but because it was treasure - it belonged to Yahweh.

### **Giving to God is never a waste.**

No matter what the Lord put in David's hands, he used it to honor God and bless God's people. A sling, a sword, a harp, a scepter, even a cup of water, and this occasion was no exception.

There were two more exceptional soldiers - Abishai and Benaiah. Abishai smote, or slew, 300 enemy soldiers earning *him* a prominent place in David's *hall of fame*.

My favorite of David's mighty men is Benaiah, a valiant fighter who killed - I mean slew - the Moab nation's two *greatest* warriors. Not impressive enough? How about this . . . he went into a pit, or a cistern, on a snowy day, to kill a lion; probably a very cranky lion, stuck inside the wet cistern, cold and likely hungry. The cistern contained the city's water supply and the Israelites couldn't get water while the lion ruled inside the cistern. Benaiah went into the cistern and came out alive. The lion didn't. But there's *more* to Benaiah! He went one-on-one with a 7½ foot tall Egyptian. The Egyptian had a spear - Benaiah, just a club. It was a lopsided fight - for the Egyptian - because fearless Benaiah snatched the Egyptian's spear and killed him with it. It's no wonder David put Benaiah in charge of his bodyguard.

The last group is *The Thirty*. The list is not very exciting - no courageous achievements were noted - just their names, yet they made the list of The Thirty most loyal and best warriors in David's army.

Let's pause on the name of the last mighty warrior - Uriah - Bathsheba's husband. David ordered Uriah's murder to hide David's adultery. Uriah was a reminder David was far from perfect and the list of *The Thirty* ends with the name of one who did not betray the king - but was betrayed *by* the king.

The Lord God did not gloss over the sin of the man after His own heart. David often needed God's grace and forgiveness.

What did the account of these courageous men say to you? That *you* must be able to slay hundreds, pick on giants, kill lions in order to be used by God? I'm not sure any of us would qualify. Isn't it that, God works through different people with different gifts to achieve His purposes? The Lord is not restricted to one person, or even... to a mighty few.

The final chapter in our lesson is 1 Chronicles 22, which brings us back to Araubah's threshing floor on Mount Moriah. This land David purchased was no ordinary piece of property. Hundreds of years prior to the angel raising his sword to destroy Jerusalem, Abraham had raised *his* hand to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Both events happened in the same location - Mount Moriah. Solomon will build the temple on Mount Moriah and scholars believe Mount Moriah was the set of hills where Jesus died on the cross. During the tribulation, a temple will be built on Mount Moriah *and* it will be where the millennial temple will be built. Don't you *love* learning how God weaves His plans? From sin, judgment and punishment, the Lord's purposes prevail.

David was in the last years of his reign - the last years of his life. He devoted them making plans for his son Solomon to build a glorious temple for God on Mount Moriah.

David would be the designer, but not the builder. God didn't want him to build the temple as he had shed much blood during his reign. God wanted His house built by a man of peace.

Just as David was not the one to build the temple, Solomon was not the one to create the plans for it. He was only 20 years old and inexperienced. David had the vision for what the temple should be and he passed that vision on to Solomon.

David applied his considerable wealth and influence to the project. Slaves living in Israel carried out the initial work. They had better skills in masonry, metal and wood working than the Israelites. Huge stones were hewed out of quarries, cut and shaped for the building, and then stored until time for Solomon to build the temple.

For years, David had been amassing materials - metal, brass, iron - amounts so large they couldn't be weighed. The quantities of gold and silver would equal billions of dollars today. Countless cedar logs were imported from Lebanon for their beautiful grain, sweet-smelling aroma and durability.

David accumulated these resources for a temple he would never build; a temple he would never see. The temple had to be wonderful; to honor God; to be a house for the *Name* of the Lord and *in* it would reside the ark of God.

1 Chronicles 28 says the Spirit of the Lord revealed to David all the plans for the temple. Warren Wiersbe wrote,

**“When you’re going to do something for the Lord on earth, be sure you get the plans from heaven.”**

Through God’s grace and Holy Spirit, we’ve learned our gracious God can use any of His children for mighty works; disobedience comes with consequences; God is merciful when sin is confessed; and although our sin offends our righteous God, He can use our failures to accomplish His perfect purposes.