

2 Samuel 23:1-7

A Just and Righteous King

Now these are the last words of David:

*The oracle of David, the son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man who was raised on high,
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
the sweet psalmist of Israel:*

*“The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me;
his word is on my tongue.
The God of Israel has spoken;
the Rock of Israel has said to me:
When one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,
he dawns on them like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,
like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.*

*For does not my house stand so with God?
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.
For will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?
But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away,
for they cannot be taken with the hand;
but the man who touches them
arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear,
and they are utterly consumed with fire.” – 2 Samuel 23:1-7 ESV*

David’s final words follow his psalm recorded in Chapter 22, which represented the establishment of his kingdom when he was delivered from Saul and crowned king of Israel. The words of 2 Samuel 23:1-7 were written at the end of his life, and are his reflections on his unique relationship with God. His legacy as a king and the future dynasty are both tied directly to God. In this last testament, David passes on what he has learned about serving as the king of Israel, the God-appointed shepherd of His people.

David is described as the “son of Jesse,” a reflection of his humble beginnings. David had not come to the throne of Israel due to royal birth or a high pedigree. He was just a commoner, the youngest son of Jesse, and a lowly shepherd of sheep. Yet, God called him and anointed him to be the next king of Israel. He “was raised on high” by God; not because he deserved to be, but because God chose to do so. It would be easy to assume that because God had referred to

David as a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), that this was the reason he had been chosen by God. However, this would have made God's choice of David based on works or merit, which does not align with the rest of Scripture.

*Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. –
Ecclesiastes 7:10 ESV*

*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have
turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. –
Romans 3:10-12 ESV*

David had a heart for God, but that does not mean he somehow deserved to be king. He had not earned his way into the position. As has been evident from his life's story, David was capable of sin, just like any other man. He had committed adultery and murder. He had been impulsive and had parented poorly. He had struggled with procrastination and occasionally exhibited less-than-stellar leadership skills. He was far from perfect, yet God had chosen him and anointed him. God had made him His spokesman.

David wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2 ESV). This isn't a case of David bragging or tooting his own horn. He is expressing amazement at the fact that he had been given the privilege and responsibility to speak on God's behalf. As king, he had been God's mouthpiece. And one of the things God said to David was about righteous leadership.

*The one who rules righteously,
who rules in the fear of God,
is like the light of morning at sunrise,
like a morning without clouds,
like the gleaming of the sun
on new grass after rain. – 2 Samuel 23:3-4 NLT*

David had not always done this well. But by the end of his life, he had learned that a king who rules righteously and fears God radiates joy and blessings on his people. David had learned the difficult lesson that, when a king rules unrighteously, he plunges his people into darkness and despair. His failure to fear God results in pain and suffering for the people under his care. And that truth is played out repeatedly in the history of Israel's kings. Obedience brings blessings. Disobedience brings curses. Righteous rulers bring light. Unrighteous rulers bring darkness.

David's next statement reflects his understanding of the promise God had made to him.

*Is it not my family God has chosen?
Yes, he has made an everlasting covenant with me.
His agreement is arranged and guaranteed in every detail.
He will ensure my safety and success. – 2 Samuel 23:5 NLT*

Yes, God had chosen David's family.

Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom....And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. – 2 Samuel 7:11-12, 16 NLT

But remember what David had said: God expected His king to rule righteously. While David's son Solomon would ascend to the throne after him and would rule well for the majority of his reign, he did not end well. He ended up worshiping false gods, and for that indiscretion, God divided his kingdom. The nation of Israel was split in two, and these two nations, Israel and Judah, ended up living in a state of constant tension, marked by hostility and warfare. There was a succession of kings, whose reigns were not marked by a fear of God, but by wickedness and idolatry. There were a few good apples in the barrel along the way but, for the most part, the kings of both nations were far from ideal. As a result, a spiritual malaise came upon both nations and, ultimately, God was forced to discipline them. Both nations were doomed to fall at the hands of their enemies and be sent into captivity for their sin and rebellion against God.

Almost prophetically, David writes:

*But the godless are like thorns to be thrown away,
for they tear the hand that touches them.
One must use iron tools to chop them down;
they will be totally consumed by fire. – 2 Samuel 23:6-7 NLT*

Godless leaders produced godless people, who found themselves living in exile because of their stubborn, rebellious hearts. Yet, the everlasting covenant to which David refers will be kept by God. He is faithful and never goes back on His Word. What He says, He does. What He promises to do, He accomplishes. God had made a covenant with David. He had promised to establish his throne forever. But since the days when the nations of Israel and Judah went into captivity in Assyria and Babylon, there has been no king to sit on the throne of David.

So, has God failed to keep His word? Was His promise to David nullified by the sinful actions of the kings of Israel and Judah? No. God would and did keep His word. The apostle John tells us exactly what happened.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. – John 1:9-13 NLT

After hundreds of years of spiritual darkness, God broke through, sending His Son as the light of the world. Jesus, a descendant of David and God's appointed successor to the throne of David, came into the world. The light of God penetrated the darkness. Yet, He was met with rejection by His own people. They failed to recognize Him as the Messiah, the Savior sent by God. Jesus will even reveal that the people loved the darkness over the light. They would prefer living in sin over freedom provided by faith in Him.

"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants." – John 3:18-21

David was a good king. He may even be considered a great king. But he was not the one true King. He was not the Savior of Israel. That role was reserved for one who would come years later. Jesus, a descendant of David, was God's appointed heir to the throne of David. He was sent by God to do what David and the other kings of Israel and Judah could have never done: provide freedom from slavery to sin and restoration to a right relationship with God. David could win victories over the Philistines, but he could not defeat sin and death. David could provide his people with periods of relative peace and tranquility, but he could not give them peace with God. Jesus came to do spiritual battle with the forces of evil. The selfless sacrifice of His sinless life on the cross broke the power of sin and death over the lives of mankind. But some would refuse His offer of salvation. They would prefer to live in darkness rather than enjoy the light of freedom and the joy of forgiveness.

David would eventually die, and his son would ascend to the throne. Solomon's kingdom would end up divided, and eventually, his people would end up living in captivity in a foreign land. But God would not be done with Israel or with David's throne. He would not break His promise to David. Despite the unfaithfulness of the successors to David's throne, God would prove faithful, sending the One who would be the consummate man after God's own heart. He would send His Son, and He would bring the most significant victory any king could ever hope to deliver.

*"Death is swallowed up in victory.
O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"*

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 NLT

2 Samuel 23:8-23

The Power of Friendship

These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite; he was chief of the three. He wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he killed at one time.

And next to him among the three mighty men was Eleazar the son of Dodo, son of Ahohi. He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and the men of Israel withdrew. He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword. And the Lord brought about a great victory that day, and the men returned after him only to strip the slain.

And next to him was Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the men fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines, and the Lord worked a great victory.

And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Adullam, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. And David said longingly, "Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the Lord and said, "Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of the thirty. And he wielded his spear against three hundred men and killed them and won a name beside the three. He was the most renowned of the thirty and became their commander, but he did not attain to the three.

*And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two ariels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men. He was renowned among the thirty, but he did not attain to the three. And David set him over his bodyguard. — 2 Samuel 23:8-23
ESV*

When reading the life of David, it is easy to picture him as a lonely, isolated figure who was always having to do everything on his own. The early years of his life, after his anointing by

Samuel, were spent in relative isolation, as he ran and hid from Saul. He had to leave behind his wife, Michal, his best friend, Jonathan, as well as his spiritual mentor, Samuel. Even during his reign, David appears to have suffered from the curse of loneliness that often accompanies leadership. He was the sole individual responsible for the care of his kingdom and the well-being of his people. God had anointed him king and given him the task of shepherding the people of Israel. But God had also given David companions and compatriots to walk beside him and assist him all along the way. Here in Chapter 3, we are introduced to thirty of them, a group of individuals referred to as David's mighty men. David was not alone. Not only was God with him, but he also had the benefit of being surrounded by those who loved him and would give their lives in support of him.

It has always been my firm belief that the mighty men listed in 2 Samuel 23 are the very same men who showed up at the cave of Adullam, when David had been forced to flee for his life from the wrath of King Saul. We are told about these individuals in 1 Samuel 22.

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. Soon his brothers and all his other relatives joined him there. Then others began coming—men who were in trouble or in debt or who were just discontented—until David was the captain of about 400 men. – 1 Samuel 22:1-2 NLT

Notice how it describes these men. They were in trouble, in debt, and discontented, and there were nearly 400 of them who showed up at David's doorstep. Not exactly what most of us would consider a great core group with which to form an army, but that's what David had to work with. Over time, some of these men would become the mighty men of David. How? What was it that transformed them from troublemakers, debtors, and malcontents? The answer is God. However, their transformation can also be attributed to the trials and tribulations they endured while walking alongside David for so many years. They had lived in the caves beside David. They had fought shoulder to shoulder with him against the enemies of Israel. They had endured hardships and the loneliness of living on the run with David. And when David had finally become the king of Israel, just as God had promised he would be, these same men were by David's side to serve alongside him. They were there when David was forced to evacuate Jerusalem when his son Absalom turned the people of Israel against him and took his throne.

But these men stood beside David. They performed mighty deeds on his behalf. However, time and again, we discover that their strength came from God. Sprinkled throughout this chronicle of their mighty deeds, are clear indications that their accomplishments were due to God.

And the Lord brought about a great victory that day... – 2 Samuel 23:10 ESV

...and the Lord worked a great victory. – 2 Samuel 23:12 ESV

The list of their exploits is impressive, and their accomplishments are not to be ignored. But we have to ask ourselves why the author chose to place this list of mighty men and their mighty deeds at the very end of his letter. If you recall, these closing chapters of 2 Samuel form a kind

of appendix to the book. They are a wrap-up of David's life. Also, the content of these chapters is not in chronological order. They offer a glimpse back, providing valuable insights into some important details about David's long and storied life. This list of mighty men lets us know that David had help along the way. He was never alone. God had given him companions, faithful men who served him with distinction, displaying the characteristics of bravery, self-sacrifice, dedication, and unwavering loyalty. Rather than being impressed with their deeds, we should be blown away by their faithfulness to David. Virtually every one of their accomplishments was done on behalf of David, and not for their own glory. Of the 30 men mentioned, only a handful have the distinction of having their names listed. There are Josheb-basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah, the three men who seemed to serve as commanders over the 30. It was probably these three who risked their lives to fulfill David's wish to drink water from the well at his hometown of Bethlehem. And when they had risked life and limb to bring David water from that well, he poured it out as a sacrifice to God, unwilling to enjoy the refreshment it would bring, because they had risked their lives for him.

The text says that Josheb-Basshebeth killed 800 men with his spear in one battle. Eleazar "struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword" (2 Samuel 23:10 ESV). Shammah "took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines" (2 Samuel 23:12 ESV). Impressive? No doubt about it. But it was God who gave these men their victories. They served David, but ultimately, they were instruments of God. He is the one who had placed them in David's life and equipped them for service to the king. Great leaders will always find themselves surrounded by great men and women who come alongside them and serve them selflessly and faithfully. The exploits of these men are not listed to impress us, but rather to remind us that God is always at work in and around our lives, using others to accomplish His will for us. David had his mighty men. But we each have our faithful friends, those individuals who will stand beside us and fight alongside us during the difficult days of our lives. How will we know who they are? They will show up in the darkest moments of our lives. They will be the ones who cry with us, rejoice alongside us, rescue us, pray for us, and refuse to abandon us, even when things get tough.

But before you start trying to determine who the mighty men or women in your life are, why not spend time asking whether you are performing the very same role in someone else's life? Are you a faithful, dedicated, loyal friend whom God is using in the life of another? Are you present when tragedy strikes someone else's life? Are you willing to risk life and limb for the sake of another? Will you wield the spiritual sword on behalf of someone else until your strength is gone? We all need more mighty men and women in our lives, willing to give their all on behalf of someone other than themselves.

2 Samuel 23:24-39

A Friend Indeed

Asahel the brother of Joab was one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, Shammah of Harod, Elikah of Harod, Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkeiah of Tekoa, Abiezer of Anathoth, Mebunnai the Hushathite, Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai of Netophah, Heleb the son of Baanah of Netophah, Ittai the son of Ribai of Gibeah of the people of Benjamin, Benaiah of Pirathon, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash, Abi-albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth of Bahurim, Eliahba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai of Maacah, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, Hezro of Carmel, Paarai the Arbite, Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai of Beeroth, the armor-bearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah, Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all. – 2 Samuel 23:24-39 ESV

Chapter 23 closes with a list of 37 men. Several things should jump out. First of all is the inclusion of the name of Uriah the Hittite, the man David had exposed to enemy fire on the front lines so that he might be killed and so that David could take his wife Bathsheba as his own. All of this had been done to cover up David's affair with her and the pregnancy that had resulted from it. While Uriah had been killed early on in David's reign, he is recognized here at the end of David's life as one of "the Thirty." We don't know exactly what that title entails or what the responsibilities for each of these men were, but we do know that they were considered men of distinction. Even David had to admit that Uriah, though long dead, was a man of integrity, having refused to give in to David's attempts to get him to sleep with his wife while his fellow soldiers were battling the enemy. Uriah had turned down David's counsel to enjoy the comforts of home, instead choosing to sleep at the doorstep of the king's palace. And he willingly returned to the front lines, unknowingly carrying his own death sentence, in the form of a letter from David to Joab, commanding that Uriah be exposed to deadly enemy fire on the front lines and left to die.

Another thing that jumps out is the variety of men on this list. Some were Israelites. Others were not. You have groups listed, such as the Paltites, Hushathites, Ahohites, Arbathites, Shaalbonites, Hararites, Gilonites, Arbiites, Gadites, Ammonites, Ithrites, and Hittites. We don't know much about these people groups, but the list reveals the ethnic diversity of David's mighty men. David's kingdom and his army were multicultural, and they shared a common love for David. They were willing, if necessary, to sacrifice their lives for him. We are not given any specifics regarding the actions of these men or how they had come to be included in "the Thirty", but they were special to David. They had proved faithful to him over the years. No doubt there were some, like Uriah, who gave their lives for David. Others fought for him or provided him with counsel and advice. They had diverse backgrounds and different duties, but they all shared a common bond with David.

Conspicuously absent from the list is Joab, the long-time commander of David's armies and the man who had stood beside him all the years of his life. Joab had disobeyed David and killed

Absalom, David's son. He had also killed Abner and Amasa, against the wishes of David. So, he is not included in David's inner circle. But his armor bearer was.

A vital character quality of a true friend is that of loyalty. These men had proven themselves loyal and dedicated to David. Joab had as well, but he had also shown himself to be blunt and brutally honest with David. He loved him enough to call him out. When David was stuck in a state of perpetual mourning over the death of Absalom, it was Joab who called him out and demanded that he act like a king or face the loss of his kingdom. David needed to hear what Joab had to say. There were times when Joab did what David was either afraid or reluctant to do. That, too, is an important character quality of a true friend. Someone who always agrees with you or overlooks your faults and sins is not someone who loves you. Solomon, the son of David, would record the following sayings in his book of Proverbs:

Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. – Proverbs 27:6 NLT

In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery. – Proverbs 28:23 NLT

The truth is, we all need someone like Joab in our lives. It's always great to be surrounded by those who look up to you and who are willing to do whatever it takes to make you successful. But sometimes we need one individual who is willing to say the hard things and to hold us to a higher standard. Joab and David didn't always get along. They didn't always agree. But Joab had proven himself faithful to David, time and time again. And he loved David too much to watch him do nothing, risking his kingdom by losing the respect of his people.

David had no shortage of faithful followers, brave companions, and dedicated servants. But there were times when he could have used a few more men like Joab in his life. What kind of friend are you? Are you steadfast and faithful, always there when your friends need you? Are you willing to risk losing a friend by speaking up and calling them out over their sins? Joab was far from perfect. He had his struggles with anger, impulsiveness, and seeking revenge. But he loved David greatly. So much so that he was willing to risk David's wrath by standing up to David when he knew that David was wrong. A godly leader who has followers is fortunate, but a godly leader who has faithful and honest friends is blessed.

2 Samuel 24:1-10

God Alone

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah." So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, "Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people." But Joab said to the king, "May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" But the king's word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people of Israel. They crossed the Jordan and began from Aroer, and from the city that is in the middle of the valley, toward Gad and on to Jazer. Then they came to Gilead, and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites; and they came to Dan, and from Dan they went around to Sidon, and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites; and they went out to the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba. So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000.

But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly." – 2 Samuel 24:1-10 ESV

This closing chapter of the book of 2 Samuel will not end with David's death, but with a recollection of yet another of David's sins against God. This time, he will be guilty of taking a census to determine the size of his army. Most commentators believe this was done late in David's reign and life, because he would involve Joab, the commander of his army, as well as his troops, to travel across the length and breadth of the kingdom to take the census, a job that would take them nine months to complete. So, it is believed that this event had to have taken place during an extended period of peace, when there was no imminent threat of war. The latter years of David's reign were the only time when this could have happened.

But regardless of when it happened, the main point is that it *did* happen. There is some confusion regarding this point, as the book of 1 Chronicles, in recounting the same episode, states, "Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:1 ESV). And yet, in this version of the story, it says, "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah'" (2 Samuel 24:1 ESV). So, which was it? Did Satan incite David to number Israel, or was it God? While this may appear to be a contradiction, it is actually a matter of perspective. We know from the book of James that God does not tempt anyone to sin.

God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. – James 1:13 NLT

But God does discipline His people for their sins. And He has a track record of using others to accomplish His will, including the kings of foreign nations and even Satan himself. In the book of Exodus, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, so he would refuse to let the people of Israel go. But his stubborn refusal would result in yet another display of God's glory and greatness. All of this was so that the people of Israel, having lived in Egypt for 400 years, would know that their God was greater than the false gods of Egypt.

In the case of David, recounted in this closing chapter of 2 Samuel, it seems that God desired to punish Israel for their disobedience, so he allowed Satan to entice David to take the census. It was in keeping with God's plan to discipline His own people, but Satan was the instigator of David's rebellious decision to do what he did. But why did God consider taking a census to be a sin? What was so wrong with David wanting to know the size of his army? The problem does not appear to be the taking of the census itself, but rather the motivation behind David's decision to do it in the first place. David wrote:

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.* – Psalm 20:7 ESV

Another anonymous psalm states a similar truth:

*The best-equipped army cannot save a king,
nor is great strength enough to save a warrior.
Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory—
for all its strength, it cannot save you.* – Psalm 33:16-17 NLT

In taking a census of his fighting forces, David revealed that his hope and trust were in his army, and not God. He was placing his confidence in the size of his mighty military machine, not the omnipotence of God Almighty.

Driven by curiosity and a need for reassurance, David sent the military commander and his troops to scour the land, determining the exact number of all the men qualified to serve in his army. It is essential to recall that this was likely done during a time of peace, when there was no pressing need for a larger army. But David was determined to know, and his actions were sinful. At the heart of David's sin was his lack of trust in God, which probably reflected the hearts of the people. God was angry with them, but the text does not tell us why. Perhaps it was their lack of trust in Him that was the real issue here. David, as the king and legal representative of the people, was acting out the very heart attitude of the people of Israel. They had begun to place their trust in someone or something other than Yahweh. Perhaps they had become comfortable with David as their king and overly confident in his military prowess and the army's ability to protect them from their enemies. By the latter years of David's reign, Israel had become a mighty nation and a force to be reckoned with in the region. Their success had produced overconfidence. As is usually the case in most of our lives, when things are going well, we tend to forget about God. In times of relative peace and tranquility, we find it easy to lose

our need for God. Whatever it was that the Israelites had done, God was angry with them, and He used David to bring about a fitting punishment for their sin.

Against Joab's better judgment of Joab, David commanded the census to be taken, and nine months later, he got the news he was looking.

...in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000. – 2 Samuel 24:9 ESV

One million three hundred thousand men. That is a huge army by any standard. It must have made David proud to know that he had those kinds of numbers at his disposal. This news would have fed his pride and boosted his ego. He was a powerful king with a formidable army at his disposal. But David's moment of ego-driven ecstasy would be short-lived. We're told that, "after he had taken the census, David's conscience began to bother him" (2 Samuel 24:10 NLT).

He had second thoughts about what he had done. It may be that he recalled the words of his own psalm. Whatever the case, his heart was burdened by what he had done. He recognized his actions as sinful and confessed it openly to God.

"I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt, Lord, for doing this foolish thing." – 2 Samuel 24:10 NLT

David had sinned. No surprise there. We have seen him sin before. However, the key lesson in this passage is that David acknowledged his sin and confessed it to God. He admitted his guilt and sought God's forgiveness. He didn't attempt to blame anyone else for his actions. He didn't make excuses. And David confessed his sin before God had done anything to discipline him for it. Sometimes, we can sin against God and be completely comfortable with our actions until He chooses to punish us. Too often, it is when the disciplining hand of God falls on us that we see the folly of our sin and confess it to Him. But David confessed before any discipline had taken place. His heart was sensitive enough to recognize the error of his ways and to admit it to God. He didn't wait until God's judgment fell.

Trust in God is a vital characteristic for the child of God. The proverbs state:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart;
do not depend on your own understanding.
Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take. – Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT*

In numbering the people, David illustrated his failure to trust God. He was putting his hope and trust in something he could see and count. He was placing his confidence in the physical size of his army, not the invisible might of his God. It's always easier to trust in something we can see and touch than to place our confidence in a God who is hidden from our eyes. But God had proven Himself faithful to David, time and time again. He had rescued him repeatedly. He had

protected him countless times throughout his life. But here, near the end of his life, David found himself putting his trust in something other than God, and he would pay the consequences for his sin.

As followers of God, we must remember that “we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12 NLT). If we put our hope and confidence in the things of this world, we will lose the battle. We are in the midst of a spiritual battle that will require faith and hope in God. The size of our army or our bank account will not help us in this conflict. Our physical strength will be no match for the spiritual enemies we face. David could number his army, but they would not be his source of salvation in a time of need. God alone can save. God alone deserves our trust. God alone is the one who warrants our attention, affection, and hope.

2 Samuel 24:11-25

The Lord Responded

And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.'" So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house."

And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David went up at Gad's word, as the Lord commanded. And when Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming on toward him. And Araunah went out and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground. And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be averted from the people." Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you." But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel. – 2 Samuel 24:11-25 ESV

David had sinned. He had conducted a census to determine the size of his nation and his army. In doing so, he revealed that his trust was in his own strength as king, which was based on the size and strength of his army. But David soon regretted his decision and recognized that he had sinned against God. He even confessed his sin to God.

"I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly." – 2 Samuel 24:10 ESV

David could confess his sin, but the iniquity and guilt remained. David knew that restitution needed to be made. A payment was necessary to cover the sin he had committed. As the author of Hebrews reminds us: “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22 ESV). David couldn’t just say, “I’m sorry” and then expect everything to go back to the way it was. Payment for sin was required, and God would offer David three different payment plans.

He sent word to David through a prophet named Gad. “I will give you three choices. Choose one of these punishments, and I will inflict it on you” (2 Samuel 24:12 NLT). His three choices included a lengthy famine, a devastating plague, or a three-month time period where his mighty army would be powerless against its enemies. In all three cases, death was a non-negotiable outcome. His people were either going to die by the sword, starvation, or sickness. David’s response seems to indicate that the one option he ruled out was the three month’s worth of losses at the hands of his enemies. He cried out to God, “Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great. Do not let me fall into human hands” (2 Samuel 24:14 NLT).

So, God sent a plague across the entire nation of Israel. Remember, David had just finished numbering his people and determining the size of his fighting force. He had discovered that he had a potential army of 1.3 million men. That number must have pleased David greatly when he heard it. But then the guilt had set in when he had realized what he had done. The guilt led to his confession, and now God was going to exact payment for his sin. As a result of the plague, David lost 70,000 men, not to mention an undisclosed number of women and children. The 70,000 number represented close to 20 percent of his fighting force. And they all died as a result of David’s sin, not because they had done anything to deserve it.

When David saw firsthand the destruction he had brought upon his people, he cried out to God again. “I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are as innocent as sheep—what have they done? Let your anger fall against me and my family” (2 Samuel 24:17 NLT). And God commanded David, “Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite” (2 Samuel 24:18 NLT). This is where things get interesting. The threshing floor of Araunah was where the angel of the Lord had been stopped by God from bringing any more destruction upon the people.

But as the angel was preparing to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented and said to the death angel, “Stop! That is enough!” At that moment the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. – 2 Samuel 24:16 NLT

This place has special significance because it was there that Abraham had been prepared to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice to God. God had told him:

“Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.” – Genesis 22:2 ESV

And just as Abraham had been ready to take the life of his own son, an angel of the Lord stayed his hand. Then God provided a substitute sacrifice, a ram whose horns had been caught in a thicket. That ram took the place of Isaac. Its blood was spilled instead of Isaac's. On that very same spot, hundreds of years later, God commanded David to build an altar and offer a sacrifice on behalf of his people.

David built an altar there to the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the Lord answered his prayer for the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped. – 2 Samuel 24:25 NLT

It would be on this very same spot, the threshing floor of Araunah, that Solomon built the Temple. And it would be in that Temple where countless sacrifices would be made on behalf of the people, because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. David could confess his sins, but payment was still required.

As believers in Christ, we live under a different dispensation. We are no longer required to make payment for our sins. We don't have to shed the blood of an innocent animal to satisfy the just demands of a holy God. Why? Because our sins have been paid for in full. The apostle John reminds us, "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:9 NLT). All we have to do is confess our sins. There is no more condemnation, and no further payment required. Jesus paid it all. The author of Hebrews tells us just how different things are now because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

The sacrifices under that system [the Mosaic law] were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. – Hebrews 10:1-4 NLT

But he goes on to give us the good news:

For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. – Hebrews 10:10 NLT

Our sins, past, present, and future, have all been paid for by Christ's death on the cross. He paid the debt we owed. He covered our sins with His blood. And as a result, we have complete forgiveness for ALL of our sins. We don't have to ask for forgiveness; we simply have to confess our sins. The forgiveness is guaranteed. When we sin, God's Spirit convicts us, and that conviction leads us to confess our sin to God. Confession is simply agreeing with that we have sinned against Him. When we confess, He responds with forgiveness, each and every time.

