



2 SAMUEL 21 - 24
A KING IN PLACE OF THE KING
Week 38 – David’s Final Acts

Introduction

We have come to the final chapters in the story of one of the most significant characters in the Bible – King David – the “man after God’s own heart.” The Holy Spirit has taught us, through the life of David, that even a flawed human being can be an intimate with the Almighty, and greatly used for His purposes. God uses ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary things He has planned.

You might expect the final chapters of David’s story to read like a glorious crescendo to his life and work. On the contrary, David keeps ‘falling forward’ all the way to the finish line. If there is any character that stands out, it is GOD, whose mercy carries David to the end of his journey and to an altar of sacrifice.

The Gibeonite revenge: 21:1-14

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the Lord. And the Lord said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death" (21:1).

God has a long memory. He does not forget the vows that we make and He holds us accountable when those vows are broken. Some 400 years earlier, Joshua had entered into a covenant with the Gibeonites, without asking God first (see Joshua 9). Joshua vowed never to destroy them.

About 350 years after Joshua, king Saul had violated this vow and sought to destroy the Gibeonites. Now, during David's reign, the people of Israel were being held accountable for Saul's breach of Joshua's vow.

"When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

The famine lasted 3 years and finally David was told of the connection between the famine and the broken vow. As a result, 7 sons from the household of Saul were handed over to the Gibeonites to be executed. Rizpah (a concubine of Saul and mother of 2 of the sons) acted with love and courage by caring for the exposed bodies of all 7 men throughout the harvest season (21:10). Her noble example reminded David that the bones of Saul, Jonathan and his brothers had not been given a proper burial. Thus, David took all of the remains of Saul and his sons and buried them together in the family tomb of Saul's father, Kish.

God takes seriously ALL vows that we make – marriage vows, business vows, vows to fulfill certain duties of office, etc. And time does not weaken the strength of vows from God's point of view. *"Never forget, God can outwait you. Time is always on His side."* (Beth Moore, *A Heart Like His*, p.232). Take some time to consider: Are there vows that you made in the past that you have failed to keep?

Has God been trying to get your attention concerning these broken vows? If so, there are 3 steps you can take: 1) Repent of the sin of breaking your vow. 2) Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the deeper issues that caused you to abandon your vow. 3) Recommit to keeping the vow, with God's help.

Giant-killers: 21:15-22

Recall that David killed Goliath, the Philistine giant, in one of the opening scenes of his story (1Samuel 17). Now, near the end of his story, we learn that Goliath had 4 giant sons that also were killed by 4 of David's mighty warriors. The old rivalry remained between the giants of Philistia and the warriors of Israel.

"These four were born to the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants" (21:22).

All of the heroic activity in Israel did not center just on King David. There were many other mighty warriors and giant-killers who performed acts of great faith and courage.

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins uses many case studies to show how the greatest organizations are not led by one super-hero; rather, they are led by lesser known leaders who empower, release and celebrate the great deeds of other people in their organizations.

Great leaders gather and empower great warriors; they do NOT kill all of the giants by themselves. How about you? Are you empowering other giant-killers? Are you celebrating the achievements of others? Or, are you trying to do it all by yourself?

David's song: 22:1-51 (same as Psalm 18)

This "song of David's life" is found both here and at "Psalm 18" in the Hebrew songbook, making it one of the most important Psalms that David wrote. It encapsulates most of the major themes of his life and walk with God. It can be regarded as the one song that David would have people read if they wanted to learn about his walk with God.

A song celebrating David's leadership: 23:1-7

This short song celebrates the blessing David was given to be the king of Israel. At the core of the song is God's description of the God-fearing leader and his/her impact on those being led:

“The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, ‘He who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.’ Truly is not my house so with God?(23:3-5)

Take some time to consider the impact of your own leadership on other people. Would they describe their experience under your leadership as a sunny morning with new grass sprouting everywhere? When was the last time you allowed those you lead to speak into your leadership strengths and weaknesses? What can you do to improve your leadership so that your “house” feels blessed under your care?

David’s 3 mighty men: 23:8-17

Among all of David’s warriors, 3 were distinguished by their exceptional acts of valor: Adino, Eleazar and Shammah. One of their acts was done specifically to show their loyalty to David:

David had a craving and said, “Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!” So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord; and he said, “Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?”(23:15-17).

If David had drunk the water, this might have been regarded as a case of hero-worship. Instead, David gave the offering to the Lord, who alone deserved the honor and glory for all that David had accomplished, and for all of the mighty men he had been given.

The thirty mighty men: 23:18-39

The 30 mighty men are listed, along with their leaders. Notable in this list are: Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba (whom David had killed) and Eliam the father of Bathsheba and son of Ahithophel.

Now we can understand why, when David sent to find out who Bathsheba was, the messenger had replied: *“This is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite”* (2Sam. 11:3).

Eliam and Uriah would have been well known to David. Add to this the fact that Ahithophel, Bathsheba’s grandfather, was David’s close friend and counselor. David’s sin with Bathsheba involved a significant network of very close friends and fellow servants whom he transgressed against.

Who are the mighty men and women that support you in life? Who do you call on in times of battle? It is important to have people who will pray for and with you, who will point you to God’s Word and encourage you to remain steadfast.

Once you see who they are, do not take the privilege of their friendship and support for granted. Who might you need to go to and be humble before?

David numbers his troops: 24:1-15

Several of Israel’s leaders fell victim to the sin of pride. They wanted to assess the greatness of their life’s work and, in various ways, sinned against the Lord by doing so (Hezekiah - 2Kings 20:12-19; Saul - 1Samuel 15:12; Absalom - 2Samuel 18:18.)

David wanted to number his troops in order to assess the strength of his kingdom. Joab and the commanders of the army tried to talk David out of this action; but they were unable to persuade him. It took 9 months and 20 days to complete the numbering, so David had plenty of time to repent of his decision; but he did not.

Who have you given permission to speak into your life, even to speak difficult words of correction when necessary? Are you open to such words of correction? Proverbs reminds us: *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy”* (Proverbs 27:6). A true friend will tell you what you NEED to hear, not what you WANT to hear. Are you keeping an open ear to the reproof of your friend(s)?

When we compare the two accounts of this sin, we see the involvement of David, God and Satan. Notice how 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles look at it from different angles:

“Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah” (24:1).

“Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel” (1Chronicles 21:1).

God never tempts anyone to sin (see James 1:13). On the other hand, God sometimes allows Satan to tempt one of his children (eg. the case of Job). This is what happened with David. God allowed Satan to tempt David to number his troops. He knew there was hidden pride that needed to be brought into the light and dealt with.

At the same time, God was seeking an opportunity to discipline the nation as a whole for some undisclosed sin. (The prophets would later disclose many of Israel’s specific sins.) Thus, the sovereign purposes of God were woven together through the actions of Satan and David.

We cannot pretend to know the will and ways of God. There are MANY things that happen in life that we will never fully understand; but we must TRUST God’s wisdom and sovereignty. He knows exactly what He is doing. He makes no mistakes.

We are not told in this instance WHY God was seeking an occasion to discipline Israel. We just know that He was. Are you able to allow God’s ways to be “higher than your ways,” and His understanding to be “higher than your understanding?” (Isaiah 55:9).

When David had to choose between 7 years of famine, 3 months of fleeing from an enemy, or 3 days of pestilence, he chose the last because he knew the mercy of God and would far rather allow his just and merciful Shepherd be the one to measure out discipline.

Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man” (24:14).

God is just and merciful. We must continue to grow to know Him in both attributes, for He alone knows how to blend justice and mercy into perfect balance for every situation. David shows us that desiring God's hand in our lives is by far the best choice, no matter how it will end up. God's character is worthy of our trust.

David builds an altar: 24:16-25

The 3-day pestilence resulted in the deaths of 70,000 in Israel. God stopped the hand of the destroying angel as it was raised over Jerusalem, more specifically, over the threshing floor of Araunah.

When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Withdraw your hand!" And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (24:16).

There may be more here than just God's grief over Israel's destruction. Going back into history to the story of Abraham and Isaac, we recall the moment when Abraham placed his only son on an altar and lifted his hand in order to slay him (Genesis 22:10-12). The voice of God stayed the hand of Abraham in that very moment.

The site where God stayed the hand of Abraham was the exact same site as here, where God stayed the hand of the destroying angel – Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. Was God moved by the memory of a father being willing to sacrifice his one and only beloved son? For Abraham and Isaac, God provided a substitute sacrifice in the form of a ram caught in a thicket nearby. Abraham offered that substitute sacrifice on the altar before God.

Was God further moved by the fact that in this same city, Jerusalem, His own Son would die as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world? God would not stay His own hand of justice against His own Son. He would slay Him for the sins of the world. David purchased the plot of ground from Araunah and built an altar on it.

This later became the very spot on which Solomon would build the Temple. Substitute sacrifices would be offered perpetually on this very spot, showing God's mercy toward sinners.

No wonder God was moved with grief in this moment. Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem was the most important geographical place in Israel's history. It was the place depicting the truth that a holy God grieves over the sin of humanity, and is thereby moved to provide a sacrifice on the altar that will remove mankind's sin and allow fellowship with God to be restored. Mt. Moriah = God's Mercy!