

King David

Numbers

2 Samuel 24

September 29, 2019 am

HDBC

It would be hard to imagine life without numbers. You can't go through a day without using numbers in a variety of ways. **When you pay your bill at the store you use numbers. When you check the time, numbers are involved. This year America celebrated the 50th anniversary of putting the first man on the moon.** How did they do that? Numbers!

Numbers are one of the first things we teach young children. They learn to count to five using their fingers. Elementary children learn the basics of arithmetic. As students move through secondary grades they are exposed to algebra, trigonometry and calculus. **NUMBERS!**

Numbers are important to leaders. **Politicians** use numbers to measure their popularity. **Military leaders** use numbers to measure the probability of success in battle. **Governments** use numbers to assess the present and plan for the future. David understood the importance of numbers. But numbers were also associated with one of his greatest sins. He decided to count the people. Sounds innocent, but it turned out to be a tragic and costly mistake.

In his book about David, Charles Swindoll points out that *age alone is no guarantee of maturity or freedom from error.* It would be great if age guaranteed wisdom and the ability to avoid making really bad mistakes. But we know that is not true. We will never outgrow the ability or propensity to sin against God . . . not in this life. It is sadly true that some who fall the hardest are those who have walked with the Lord the longest. Freedom from sin will only come when we escape this world and are in the presence of God.

David was a great man! But he was not perfect. He made bad decisions in his personal life, but also in his political life. 2 Samuel 24 (and 1 Chronicles 21) relate a decision that David made that affected thousands of lives. And it was all about **Numbers**. Note five things in the passage.

1. A bad decision (1-9)

Verse one raises more questions than it answers.

Why did the anger of the Lord burn against Israel . . . again?

Why did this incite David against them?

Why would he be led to number the people?

What we do know is that David made a decision to count the people. He wanted to take a census. The text does not tell us why, but I think it is safe to assume either pride or fear were involved. When the final numbers are reported, it is not a total count of the population, but rather of the men of war. David wanted to see just how big his army was.

God was angry with Israel. We don't know why. Apparently David was ticked off about something, as well. This incited him to take a census of his army. Sounds innocent. But remember, we don't know all the facts.

Chapter 22 revealed that David had once again been at war with his arch enemies the Philistines. He prevailed, but they just would not go away. Some of those were Goliath's relatives, including a brother. Maybe David numbered his army out of pride in his victories or out of fear over future battles with these foes. Both seem likely.

The Bible makes it clear that this was a problem. Joab, the commander of David's army, advised against it. (2-4). He strongly protested, but David would not be dissuaded. He ordered the census and it was done.

1 Chronicles 21 offers another account of this same event and we learn a little more. There we learn that Satan was actually instrumental in moving David to take this census. That is mind-boggling. Satan can influence the thoughts, even of people who love God and desire to honor Him. Paul reinforces this same truth in multiple places in the N.T.

Satan nudged David in this direction. Joab pushed back. But David refused to listen. As king, he could do whatever he wanted. Leaders ignore good advice to their own peril.

2. A troubled heart (10)

The census was taken just as David ordered. But then he has second thoughts. He is troubled by what he has done.

Troubled – This is a severe word. It means, to be attacked or assaulted. Used of a city that was defeated and destroyed. Conveys the idea of being wounded and disabled.

Deep inside, David was coming under the convicting hand of God that what he had done was wrong. That is the first step to a restored fellowship with God. Realization that you have done wrong. A sense of your own sin. The key is what you do with that. Some suppress these divine promptings until they fade into the background covered with the callouses of rebellion. Others, like David, grieve over their sin, confess and repent to God.

What do you do when you are troubled over your own sin? Do what David did. Read the last half of verse 10. He confessed and sought forgiveness. This was not David's first experience with confession and repentance. He knew God would forgive, but he did not take that lightly.

At this point we find God doing something that I don't think we see Him doing at any other place in the Bible.

3. A surprising offer (11-14) Read the text

Wow! David must choose the punishment from three options.

- 1) Seven years of famine
- 2) Three months of being pursued by enemies
- 3) Three days of pestilence in the land

Can you imagine! All are tough. All will be costly. Great reminder that there are consequences for our sins. David even said, ***I am in great distress***. Means to be *tied up, restricted, cramped*. His stomach was churning on the inside. But he made a decision. He would choose . . . three days of disease. Listen to the words of David,

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.

Swindoll rightly points out, *if you want grace, fall into the hands of God. If you want judgment fall into the hands of fellow human beings.*

4. A severe judgment (15-17)

It only lasted for three days, but it was costly. David watched as 70,000 men died in three days of disease. God even sent an angel to destroy the city of Jerusalem. But, as he was about to do so, God stopped the angel by declaring, ***it is enough***. 1 Chronicles 21 adds that . . .

David actually saw this angel standing between heaven and earth with sword drawn in his hand outstretched over the city he loved. David and his elders fell on their faces, wearing sackcloth as signs of repentance. Then, in a great display of humility David prayed . . .

Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house. (17)

I love that. That is humble, godly leadership. He is taking responsibility and pleading with God for his people.

5. A clear message (18-25) Read the text

There is more here than just the account of an altar being built and a sacrifice being made. What happened here points to the gospel, the good news that is the central theme of the entire Bible. This message can be understood in three simple statements.

1) **God loves us and desires that we love him back.** (altar = worship)

An altar is a place of worship. Worship is an expression of love by the created for the creator. He invites David to come and worship Him. Reminds us that God desires fellowship with us.

2) **Sin leads to death.** (altar = death)

That particular judgment is over but there are 70,000 new graves. Families without husbands, dads, brothers. Sin is costly. It kills. In order for our sins to be forgiven, death has to occur. Universal principle demonstrated in the O.T. & stated simply in N.T. *Wages of sin is death.*

Someone or something dies on an altar. In this case it was oxen. But these oxen were simply standing in for a greater sacrifice that would come generations later. They are a picture of Jesus.

1 Chronicles 21:26-27 offers great insight here. Remember the angel with the sword who was prepared to destroy Jerusalem? David saw this angel, with sword in hand, waiting on orders from the Lord. What happened next teaches us such an important truth. Listen . . .

*Then David built an altar to the Lord there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And he called to the Lord and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. **The Lord commanded the angel and he put his sword back in its sheath.***

The judgment is averted because of what happened on the altar. The cross was the altar upon which Jesus gave his life. Because of the death of Jesus on the cross, the sword of judgment can be put back into its sheath for those who trust Jesus.

3) Salvation is free, but not cheap.

David made an important statement to Araunah. I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing. Salvation is free, in that we cannot earn it or purchase it. However, we do bring something to the table. We bring our lives. Jesus made it clear when he said, *if you want to come after me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me.*

There is no salvation where there is no surrender.