

**The Search for a King Study #11**  
**2 Samuel 24.1-25**  
***Judgment on the King***

**Theme Verse**

*“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.”*

2 Samuel 24.17

**Explanation**

Other historical books in the Bible tell about the end of David’s life, but the author of Samuel chose to end his account of David’s life with this passage. As you would expect, 2 Samuel 24 brings to conclusion many of the themes that we have been studying in the life David thus far. We will see a final, drastic failure on the part of God’s anointed king at the height of his kingdom. We will see the sin and folly of finding significance and security from something other than God. We will see the judgment of God on such sin as a painful, yet necessary, demonstration of God’s supreme authority. And we will see the broken heart of a man who repents and takes refuge in the ultimate mercy of God.

Two curious observations about the text are important for understanding its theme. First, when David commits the sin of taking the census, he does so because God has incited him against the people of Israel. How would a census be a detriment against the people? 3 reasons:

- 1) For a nation as large as this in the ancient times, a census would have been a logistical nightmare.
- 2) The census is a sign of David’s pride, a statement that he had control over this people and could make over a million people do his bidding. Deuteronomy 17 forbids that a king of Israel would forget that he is simply one from among a tribe of brothers.
- 3) When any king of Israel sinned against God, it did not bode well for the people of Israel. As you read through the rest of the history books, each king will be evaluated based on His faithfulness to God’s laws. As the king’s spiritual state went, so went the prosperity of the people. Thus, to have faithless king after faithless king drove Israel into captivity and spelled the destruction of the kingdom. In this chapter, we see that the sin of the king led to a pestilence on the nation.

The second curious observation from this text is this: the king taking a census is an evil act in the sight of God that demanded punishment. But why would God be upset about an unsanctioned census? Because it showed that David was placing his confidence and security in his own power, rather than in the power of God. David was looking to numbers and military might to know he was safe against invading nations, rather than to God’s strength (recall study #1, 1 Samuel 8). Therefore, the punishment for this sin would threaten the very security that David was looking to hold on to by his own power.

While this great king has fallen quite far from his former glory (1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 7), we do see the David that understands God's heart in this chapter. First, David realizes immediately that he has done something foolish. We saw when David spared Saul (1 Samuel 24), that his conscience stopped him from sinning. But later, in the story about Bathsheba, David was so blind to his sin that it took months and a direct confrontation before he realized his sin (2 Samuel 12). Here, in 2 Samuel 24, David repents quickly. Second, when he is asked to choose the consequence for his sin, he puts himself in the hands of God, because he has learned throughout his life that God is merciful (v. 14). Finally, when God puts a stop to the pestilence, David begs that God would only judge his family and offers a sacrifice. During that sacrifice, David rightly makes sure that his sacrifice is costly to himself, rather than taking something from one of his flock.

If you'll notice, God cuts the pestilence short by not bringing destruction on Jerusalem. David was right about God's mercy. We don't know if it was because of the sacrifice that Abraham offered at the same spot centuries earlier, or the special place that Jerusalem has in the heart of God, or because that's where David lived, or because that's where Jesus would bear the ultimate punishment for all sins, but as a result of his mercy, God stopped the punishment.

At the cross, centuries after this event in Jerusalem, Jesus would absorb all of the wrath of God for all the sins of every nation in history. It was a sacrifice that cost God everything, even the life of His own Son. It was a punishment on someone from David's own house (v. 17), who suffered so that Israel, and every other nation on earth, could be spared the wrath for their sins. Because of the Cross, we know that this punishment was not revenge on the part of God, but rather a disciplinary measure. God was teaching Israel to avoid such folly, and the punishment was way less than they deserved. The same holds true in your life and in mine, even when the consequences of sin seem too great for us to bear. His merciful hand never leaves us.

### **Aim**

To give our devotion to the merciful King who is grieved by sin and who suffered on our behalf.

### **Study Questions**

Think back to the other studies in the Life of David

1. What have you learned about David that you never noticed before this study?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What have you seen about God in a new way as a result of this study?

### 3. Why does God judge and show mercy in the same story?

God's judgment here and elsewhere in Scripture provides an invaluable lesson for us. 70,000 were affected in this story as a result of God's judgment, but their eternal fate rests in God's hands. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions have read this story and see the consequence of sin. Those who do not heed this warning and do not build their security on God are headed for a much worse fate than this pestilence. The mercy of God here is equally instructive: God is grieved by the sin and also by the judgment. He hates to see his people suffer. Ultimately, sins such as these will cost God the very life of His Son. Remember that Israel disrespected and defamed God so often that they deserved to be blotted out of history from the start. The same is true for us, but God's mercy triumphs.

### 4. If Jesus took all the punishment for sins for all-time, why does God still let David experience some consequences for sin?

God disciplines his children to teach them how to live properly in his eternal kingdom. These lessons are as important as life itself.

### 5. What are some ways that you are trusting in your own power for safety and security? Why does David call his act "foolish"?

### 6. Why does God demand a sacrifice for sins? Why does David think that it has to cost him something?

David is right to think that atonement for sins must cost something. Our sacrifices to God should not be only out of our excess, or else it is no sacrifice at all and brings God no glory (Genesis 4). Forgiveness always has a price. Think of a car accident: if Danny wrecks my car because of his bad driving, then he has to pay me for the damages to make up for what he has done. Or, I can forgive him, but then I must bear the cost of his error. Either way, someone pays a price. Spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically, sin and forgiveness work much the same way.

## **Prayer Guide**

Read Psalms 22

- Thank God that Jesus was rejected so that we wouldn't be.
- Thank God for never hiding his face from us.
- Thank God for being sovereign, even when we don't sense his presence.
- Ask God for the chance to make his glory known to others.