

March 5, 2017  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: The Life of David  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## THE LAST RECORDED SIN OF DAVID 2 Samuel 24

Human history has had no shortage of manmade gods. Not surprisingly those gods are typically made in humanity's image, as opposed to the true God who made us in His image. Because the false gods express the characteristics of fallen humanity, they are capricious, often angry, and demand the sacrifices of their worshipers in order to be appeased. We can easily picture the anger of Thor the hammer-wielding god associated with thunder and lightening. Or an outburst from Zeus, the Greek god of lightening and justice. In the Old Testament age, the pagans were required to offer costly sacrifices, including their own children, in order to appease the wrath of gods like Chemosh and Molech.

Unfortunately, it is easy for unbelievers and sceptics to lump the true God, our Creator, Israel's Yahweh, in that same group of mythical imaginations. There is plenty of evidence in the Bible that God can become angry. Thirty-five times in the Old Testament we read about the "anger of Yahweh." Over forty more times we read about the connection between God (*Elohiem*) and anger. He is pictured sometimes as the God with nostrils flared because of the sin of sinners who reject Him and disobey Him.

And yet, many more times we come face-to-face in the Bible with God's amazing patience, His incredible mercy, and His offer of inexhaustible grace. So which is our God? Is He patient, gracious, and merciful, or is He capable of anger against sin? The answer to that question is the proverbial "Yes." He is both. Part of the reason we struggle with this tension is because God often expresses His anger against sinners' sins by allowing them or Satan to do what they please. And the works of sin and Satan are never good.

That is the story in the later part of David's life. God grew angry at His people Israel. He allowed Satan to incite David to sin, which indicates that each of them was a willing participant. The sin brought God's justice in the form of a devastating plague. And God mercifully accepted David's sacrifice and by grace stopped the judgment. It is a fair and accurate picture of God. It is a picture we ought to remember.

### A Wrong Decision (vv.1-9).

Before us is a situation that is very difficult to understand. Why did God incite David against His people? How could God incite His servant against His people? That is what the text says happened. *Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah" (v.1).*

That God was angry with His people is a serious matter. It is difficult for us to grasp the idea that God gets angry. That is partly because our human anger is almost always a sinful expression of hurt, or selfishness, or an exploding of emotions. God's anger is always perfect, if we can describe anger with that word. His anger is an intentional, rational, decisive response to sin. For eternity God's anger will be known by sinners who refused to confess and repent of their offenses against our Holy Creator. But sometimes God is even angry against His own people.

He certainly expressed that anger at times when He was dealing with the stubborn Israelites in the desert. God was angry when His people made the golden calf. *And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you" (Exodus 32:9-10).* God grew angry with His people who would not repent in spite of repeated warnings from the prophets. Jeremiah lamented, *"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger" (Lamentations 1:12).* God's anger was pretty obvious in the smoking ruins of Jerusalem.

The good news however is that His anger against His people does not last forever. *“In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer (Isaiah 54:8). You will say in that day: “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me” (Isaiah 12:1).*

So why was God angry with His people? Possibly His anger was because of their habit of wanting to serve the gods of their pagan neighbors. That was a perennial problem for Israel, although there is no indication of that in the David story. It seems more likely that God was angry because of the way Israel treated David. Even from the beginning of the united monarchy, the Israelites were slow to recognize God’s anointed man as king. Then many of God’s people followed Absalom in rebellion against God’s anointed man. In too many ways, God’s people were characterized by Shimei who cursed God’s anointed. They were characterized by the rebellion of Sheba, an Israelite.

So the anger of Yahweh was stirred up against His people. In turn God stirred up David to do something that would bring God’s judgment. How could this be? It is crucial for us to compare the Chronicles’ account in order to understand how God carried out this anger against His people. *Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1).* This sounds a lot like the situation when Satan stirred up God against Job. Ultimately, God allowed Satan to have his way with Job, but God used the situation to teach important lessons. And so it was here in this case where God was angry with Israel and, therefore, gave Satan permission to incite or stir up David to sin.

This is probably the case in the world more than we can imagine. Most simply, there is sin in the world because of Satan. Okay, but how that impacts people and circumstances can be multifaceted. God will often use the intentional, purposeful sin of others as a tool to show His anger. The individuals can’t blame God because they are willing participants with Satan, or they are determined to express the sinfulness of their flesh. The result is never good. But it was not ultimately God who was the author of the sin. It is the individual and Satan who is to blame.

Even the stubborn general Joab understood that this was a wrong decision on David’s part. *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” (v.2).* The king commanded Joab, the general of the army to be in charge of the census. Joab resisted. *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?” (v.3).*

We know from our study in David’s life that it was not unusual for Joab to disagree with the king, his uncle David. But this time he had a good point. He argued that it would be better to simply trust God to grow the nation according to His will and plan. Okay, we agree that is true. But why was it sinful to take a census? God Himself commanded Moses to take a census on multiple occasions (Numbers 1:2-47 4:2-49; 26:2-65). King Jehoshaphat took a census and God did not condemn it (2 Chronicles 17:13-18). Kings Amaziah (2 Chronicles 15:5) and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:11-13) took military censuses and God did not forbid it. What was there about David’s census that made it a matter of Satan inciting him to sin against God?

As Joab implied, this census could result in David trusting in his massive army instead of trusting God to care for him and His people. Also, this was a certain amount of bureaucratic overreach because it was not necessary. Practically, politically, and spiritually, it was a bad idea. Nevertheless, the king prevailed and the deed was done.

The king’s servants took a census. Joab resisted, *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 (vv.4-8).*

This whole process seemed to be fraught with lethargy and unconcern. Moses's census of Israel's fighting men took one month to complete (Num. 1:1-18) and also arrived at about a high number of fighting men of 603,550 in Israel. (Num. 1:46). Joab's census took more time because the people were spread out all over the Promised Land instead of compacted within the camp as in Moses's day. Also the word "go" in verse one is the same word translated *going to and fro* on the earth in Job 1:7 which is used to describe Satan's wandering around on the earth looking for trouble. We get the idea that maybe Joab and his men were not real interested in doing this thing.

We have to admit that the totals found in the census were impressive. *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 (v.9)*. A king could become quite confident and self-assured if he knew he had about 1.5 million soldiers ready to go to war. And that really wasn't counting everyone who qualified. But, that kind of confidence in the military is precisely what God did not desire for the king of His people. God's king and God's people needed to trust in God alone.

The same principle still applies to us who claim to be God's people. It is so easy for us to chase the American dream until we catch it. The American dream makes us pretty much financially independent of God. Since God desires our faith and dependance on Him, He may not take away our financial plenty, but He might very well give us poor health along with it so that we will still have reason to trust Him daily.

### **Conviction and Confession (vv.10-17).**

The story moves from one difficult to understand situation to another hard to explain situation. First, we learn that David's heart was struck with conviction about numbering the people. *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" (v.10)*.

David was convicted of his sin when the Holy Spirit worked on his conscience. This is always the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It was evident in Old Testament circumstances. And Jesus promised regarding this current age, *"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8)*. The Holy Spirit brings conviction when He points to the violation of God's law which is written on our consciences as well as in the Bible. This why it is deadly to develop a conscience that no longer responds to the Holy Spirit's work. Paul warned us that *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared (1 Timothy 4:1-2)*.

This conviction of his conscience by the Holy Spirit is what happened to David when Nathan confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba. How David responded to the conviction in both cases is exemplary. David took full responsibility for the sin. Notice in the last part of verse ten: *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."* Yes, it was true that Satan incited David to do this sin. And yes, it was also true that God allowed Satan to incite David because God was angry with His people and would judge them for their sins. Nevertheless, the choice to number the people was David's choice. It showed lack of faith in God just as Joab had said.

It is part of human nature for us to try to shift the blame for sin. Adam told God that his sin was Eve's fault. Eve told God that her sin was the serpent's fault. Did the serpent blame Satan? And ever since that day people excuse their sin because they are just humans, or God's law is too demanding, or they just tend to make mistakes. David could have blamed Satan or he might even have been tempted to blame God. But his sin was his choice. And our sin is our choice. We do not sin because of unfair incidents in our past, or poor rearing, or the injustice of other people, or our sinful world. We sin because we choose to sin. Admitting the sin is the first and most important step.

David confessed his sin and God offered a choice of three judgments. *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" (vv.11-13).*

That God allowed the recipient of His judgement to pick his poison is highly unusual. God heard David's prayer of confession and request for forgiveness. In response, He sent His messenger, the prophet Gad, to tell David that he had three choices regarding judgment. Through the prophet, God offered David three choices. Choice one would mean that for three years the whole nation would experience bad weather resulting in famine. Choice two was that for three months David himself would be chased by his foes (he was probably getting tired of this one). Choice three was for three days of pestilence, a plague in the whole land.

This is kind of like the television game show called "Let's Make a Deal" gone haywire. In that game, there are three doors that hide prizes of various levels of goodness or benefit. Here the three doors are all various levels of badness. They vary in length of time. It's like asking if you would rather have shingles for six weeks, flu that lasts one week, or a root canal in which the pain subsides in a couple of days. If God put you on the spot and asked you to choose which of these plagues would be His justice, what would you choose?

David entrusted himself and the nation to God. In distress he trusted the LORD. That is a wise and noble response. *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" (v.14).* Facing God's judgment ought to be stressful. At such times do you argue with God? Do you blame God and accuse Him of not being fair? Do you try to find all the Scriptural reasons why God should not level judgment at all?

In this case we need to remember that God's grievance was really not with David. It is more likely that God was angry with His people because of the way they treated David. But he was the one under stress. He was definitely between a rock and a hard place and

that is stressful. In response, David wisely placed himself at God's mercy. He did not trust the vengeance of men. But he did trust God to always to the best thing.

In judgment, the LORD brought a real calamity. *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 (vv.15-16).*

Immediately upon David's plea, a plague broke out from one end of the nation to the other. In three days time, God allowed 70,000 people to die. Apparently no, or few, people had died in Jerusalem, but the death angel was on his way to virtually destroy Jerusalem with the plague. There God stopped the angel because He is merciful. Yes, but what about all those dead people? They didn't receive mercy, did they? No, they received justice. How do we explain that? It was God's decision based on His infinite wisdom.

Rather than complain to God that He has not been fair, we are wise to thank Him that He has been merciful to us. Did all those other people deserve to die? That is not our decision to make. All I know for sure is that I deserve the worst of God's wrath to be poured out on me for eternity. But God has been merciful to me and granted me eternal life. I will praise and thank Him for His mercy.

David pled for that mercy. *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" (v.17).* David begged the angel to judge only him because he was the sinner. Notice that David was still alive. God laid no judgment on him personally. But his people suffered greatly and David pled for God's mercy for them. This is the evidence of a humble and contrite heart which God will not despise.

## Contrition (vv.18-25).

What is contrition? To be contrite is to be crushed. Theologically, to be contrite is to have sorrow for and detestation of sin with a true purpose of amendment, arising from a love of God for His own perfections. Practically to be contrite means to be humbled before God because of sin. David had already learned this lesson. He knew from experience that *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalms 51:17)*. He knew that to be contrite is to be crushed, and to be crushed by God is ultimately a good thing.

What does a contrite heart look like in real life? Or we might wonder, “What does real crushing for sin look like?” It is simply an emptying of self being replaced with a desire to honor God. Wallowing in personal sorrow and self-pity is not humility. It is furthering the sin of selfishness.

David helped us understand this by illustrating a contrite heart. He engaged in reverse bargaining with Araunah. He met the guy because he obeyed God’s word. *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 (vv.18-19)*. God told David through His messenger to build an altar and offer a sacrifice. Because David’s heart was contrite, he did not hesitate. He immediately went up at Gad’s word, which was the LORD’s word.

Araunah actually pictured David’s attitude toward God. David was bowed before God and Araunah bowed before the king. *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?” (vv.20-21a)*. He showed humility before the king and with the humility a willingness to please the king.

This guy Araunah tried to give the plot of ground to David but David insisted on paying for it. Araunah himself desired to be part of the sacrifice for the sake of the king. *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, “The LORD your God accept you” (vv.21b-23)*.

The king insisted that his sacrifice would cost him. *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 (v.24)*. If there was no cost, there was no sacrifice. God’s plan clearly required a sacrifice to cover David’s offense. It is the Old Testament picture of salvation in Christ. Those sacrifices were never permanent. Christ’s sacrifice for our sins is permanent; once for all.

The LORD responded to David’s sacrifice. *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 (v.25)*. And the LORD responds to us when we plead for Him to forgive our offenses based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The perfect and complete sacrifice for sins— Jesus Christ the righteous— has already been offered for our sins. When God weighs out hearts down with conviction, we do not need to buy a threshing floor, we do not need to build an altar and offer a sacrifice, we do not need to confess to a priest, or do penance. We simply plead the blood that Christ has already offered to cover our sins.

That is true for sinners who confess their sins for the first time, and it is true for saints who confess their sins regularly. John taught us, *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2)*. When God convicts us of sin, rather than try to blame others or circumstances, we are wise to humble ourselves before Him, say what He says about us, and plead for His mercy already offered through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.