

Week 28: David Sins Again

Hook



Main Point: Godly people remain humble and trust in the Lord, not their own power.

The U.S. Census aims to count every resident in the United States every 10 years. The census is mandated by Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution and provides vital information that impacts things such as the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and the distribution of federal funds to local communities.¹

Here is a comparison of the findings of the 1950 and the 2020 U.S. Census:

Population

1950: 151,325,798

2020: 331,449,281

Percentage of people married

1950: 70% of people 14 years and over were married.

2020: 50% of people 15 years and over were married.

High School Graduates (People 25 years and older)

1950: About 34% had completed four years of high school or more.

2020: About 91% had completed four years of high school or more.

College Graduates (People 25 years and older)

1950: About 6% had completed 4 years of college or more.

2020: About 38% had completed 4 years of college or more.²

Transition: Part of today's lesson will center around one of the most disasterous surveys in history.

RECAP: Last week, we heard David's heart in his own words in two psalms he wrote that were included in the text of 2 Samuel. These two songs are a kind of summary of what his life and experience with the Lord had been like, so we would think we would be coasting toward the end of the story here. But Scripture gives us one more story of David's sin, concluding the account with the truth that, even as great of a king and warrior David was, and as much as he loved and trusted in the Lord, he was not the eternal king of peace we need. In this, the end of David's story points ahead to the distant son of David who would be that perfect king.

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Book (Note: *1 Chronicles 11:10–47; 21:1–27 are parallel to this passage.*)

Main Point: Godly people remain humble and trust in the Lord, not their own power.

2 Samuel 23:8–39 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Our battles belong to the Lord; He is our strength.

Q: Why did David pour out the water from Bethlehem to the Lord?

Q: Who is listed last in the list of mighty men and why is that significant?

This list of David’s mighty men and their exploits goes way back to the beginning of David’s flight from Saul, at the cave of Adullam (23:13). Like the psalms in the last lesson, this is more of a summary passage. When David first fled from Saul, he went alone to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest, where he ate the showbread of the tabernacle (1 Samuel 21:1–9). Then he went to Goliath’s home city of Gath, still alone, where he pretended to be insane before King Achish (1 Samuel 21:10–18). Then he fled to the cave of Adullam, where a ragtag group of “everyone who was in distress ... debt ... [or] bitter in soul” came to him and became his army of 400 mighty men (1 Samuel 22:2). David didn’t intend to gather an army, yet the Lord brought one to him. Within that larger group of 400, there were “the thirty” men who served as an elite special forces group (23:13), which was actually thirty-seven men, but that number was rounded (23:39). Within that group of thirty was an even more elite group of three (23:8).³

This section is more a short list of heroic exploits than a narrative, and rather summary-like.⁴ One mighty man killed 800 men at a time with his spear (23:8), another 300 men at a time (23:18). One mighty man killed a lion in a pit, even in the snow. In the ancient world, hunting lions was a favorite sport of kings and heroes because it showed unusual strength and bravery. Using a pit was a typical way to trap a lion, but the snow would have made it much more difficult, making this hero’s feat even more spectacular.⁵

This section does include one short narrative about David and his three most elite men when they were at the cave of Adullam. The Philistines were encamped in Bethlehem, David’s hometown, and David longingly said he wished to drink water from the well of Bethlehem. The three mighty men broke through the enemy army and got him just that, but David would not drink it; he felt it would be like drinking their blood because they had risked their lives for it. He had never intended for anyone to actually go get the water, and he would never have forgiven himself if they had been hurt. Instead, David poured it out to the Lord as an offering (23:16–17).

This story, told in the context of these heroic acts, shows their loyalty to David, their willingness to risk their lives, and their bravery and skill in accomplishing a seemingly impossible mission.⁶ David’s action wasn’t a callous disregard for all they had risked to

bring him this water; it actually honored their sacrifice even more. He was not worthy of what could have cost their blood, but the Lord was.⁷ As an offering, it was also an act of dedicating their loyalty and service to the Lord instead of to himself. This offering in the middle of the list of David's mighty men reminds us of what he wrote in the psalm before it, that the Lord was his strength and the One who delivered him from his enemies. As mighty as these men might have been, it was the Lord who was the true strength of David's army and the One in whom he trusted.

Q: In what ways are you tempted to trust in your own strength?

Q: How can having a group of like-minded people around you strengthen you in your spiritual battles? What kind of people should you surround yourself with?

The last name in the list of David's mighty men, Uriah the Hittite, is a familiar one for those who have been reading his story. After all we have read in Samuel, it cannot be accidental that his name is listed last, to call attention to it. Uriah was Bathsheba's husband, who was too honorable to sleep with his wife while his men were off at war when David was trying to cover up his sin. David finally gave instructions to put Uriah in the "heat of the battle" so he would be killed. Uriah wasn't just one of David's soldiers; he was one of his elite special forces. One of the heroes. This meant he had been with David from the beginning. David knew Uriah well, and he was a large part of David's success. Knowing this only makes David's sin more grievous. Putting Uriah's name here, at the very end of this chapter celebrating these heroes of David's army, is one more reminder that as mighty as David was, he was not perfect, and his story only points ahead to the son of David who would be perfect.

Q: What does it say about God that the Bible doesn't shy away from telling us the ugly truth about those who came before us? What does this tell us about the Gospel?

Q: How does that make you feel about your relationship with God?

2 Samuel 24:1–10 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 27:23 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Godly people can trust in God to provide what they need.

Q: Why would Joab warn David against numbering the people of Israel? Why might counting the people be a sin?

The parallel passage in Chronicles helps us to understand this story a little better. Samuel said the Lord's anger burned against Israel. We don't know why exactly, but it says "again," reminding us of the many, many times they did something to break the covenant and incite God's anger. Whatever it was, it was warranted, because God's anger is always righteous and justified.⁸ The Samuel passage says "he" incited David against them, to number Israel and Judah. The sentence structure would indicate that "he" refers to God, but in the parallel passage in Chronicles, it says Satan rose up against Israel and incited David (1 Chronicles 21:1). The word in Hebrew is "satan" which can

generally mean “the adversary” or as a proper noun, God’s supernatural adversary, Satan. In English, we have simply adopted the Hebrew word.⁹ Scholars diverge on exactly what this difference means. Some simply say that the “he” in Samuel is referring to Satan, not God. Others say that reading the two passages together shows us exactly what we see in Job, that while it is Satan who does the tempting and attacking, he can only do so with God’s permission (Job 1:1–12). God never causes evil or tempts anyone to do evil (James 1:13).¹⁰

Either way, David chose to take a census of the nation, against the advice of Joab. This is one of those times when Joab’s advice was actually wise, but David didn’t listen. It seems strange that counting the people would be considered such a grave sin. God had told them to number their warriors at the beginning and end of Numbers when they were preparing to enter the Holy Land. But this census was a counting of all the population of Israel, even though the text only tells us the number of warriors. It was normal for kings to take a census to show the greatness of their kingdom and to collect taxes from their people.¹¹ Yet this passage shows us it was a sin in God’s eyes.

Again, Chronicles gives us some insight. Later in Chronicles, when David numbered and organized the army the right way, Chronicles tells us that David didn’t number the men younger than 20, meaning the non-warriors, “for the Lord had promised to make Israel as many as the stars of heaven” (1 Chronicles 27:23). God had told the exodus generation to number their army to prepare for battle, but He had never told them to count *all* their people, because they were supposed to trust God’s promises about the greatness of His people. God’s promise was that they would be as numerous as stars in the sky and sand on the seashore, both amounts that cannot be counted (Genesis 22:17). Counting the people was putting limits on God’s promises! By counting the people, David was being prideful about the greatness of “his” kingdom, though it was really God’s kingdom. It also showed lack of trust in the Lord. He didn’t need to count the people, even the army. He only needed to trust that the Lord would provide the people and resources he needed.¹²

Godly people don’t have to assess their resources. They can trust that if the Lord calls them to do something, He will provide what they need. This was the same David who went against the giant Goliath with just a few stones and a slingshot. Yet here he was counting the people to show how great his kingdom was and see what resources he had to fight with. This behavior isn’t consistent with a man after God’s own heart, who trusts the Lord to provide for him. Or a man of humility who gives all glory to God for his victories and recognizes that the kingdom is not his but God’s. This pride and lack of trust are what made the census such a grave sin. It’s sad to see this kind of sin from David at the end of his story, but it’s another reminder that David was not the One we were waiting for. It’s yet another Old Testament account that points us ahead to Christ.

Q: How have you seen the Lord supernaturally provide for you?

Q: In what ways have you struggled to trust the Lord to provide for you?

Q: How might it change your life to trust that God's resources are limitless?

2 Samuel 24:10–17; Psalm 32; and Psalm 145:8–9 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Sin requires judgment, but our God is a God of mercy.

Q: How did David's sin affect the rest of the nation of Israel?

Q: What does Psalm 32 tell us to do when we sin? What does it say God will do?

This is an unusual story because David got to choose his punishment from three options (24:12). But “got to” might not be best way to describe it – none of the options were good! Having to choose what would happen to the people would have caused him even more distress than if God had just sent a punishment (24:14). Though David had shown lack of trust in the Lord by his sin, he decided to trust the Lord with this choice. He knew that God is more merciful than mankind, so he chose the option that did not involve humans.

Though David had several instances of serious sin and, just like all of us, must have committed daily sins throughout his life, when he stopped and thought about it, he really did trust in the Lord. And he knew just who the Lord is. Right here, in the middle of God's anger burning against Israel and a prophet telling him they were about to be punished, David confessed that God is more merciful than man. He wrote in several of his psalms that God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psalm 145:8; c.f. 86:15; 103:8). These are the words of God's own self-revelation to Moses. It is how God described Himself when Moses asked to see Him (Exodus 34:6). This is how God wanted to be known by His people. David knew this about God from experience because the Lord had shown him mercy. Though David continued to mess up, he ultimately trusted in who God said He is – merciful, compassionate, gracious and full of love. Even when he was facing God's wrath and punishment. That is someone who understands the balance of God's mercy and His judgment. God carried out His punishment yet relented when “it is enough” (24:16). David didn't blame God or call Him mean or vengeful; God *must* address sin. He trusted that God's justice would be balanced.

Psalm 32 describes how blessed we are when God forgives us. David wrote that when he kept silent about his sin or covered it up, he felt like he was wasting away, but when he confessed to the Lord, he was forgiven. The Lord's unfailing love surrounds those who trust in Him. David personally experienced God's forgiveness and mercy and wrote to encourage others to go to Him in prayer and expect mercy and forgiveness. We can trust that God's punishment will be just. But we can also expect mercy and grace. This is the heart of the Gospel. This is who our God is.

Q: How have you experienced God's mercy and forgiveness?

Q: What does God's mercy and compassion say about how we should treat others?

Q: In what ways can you show more compassion, mercy, and grace? To whom is God leading you to show more compassion and grace?

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Took

Main Point: Godly people stay humble and trust in the Lord, not their own power.

Read Psalm 32. This passage describes how blessed we are when God forgives us. David wrote that when he kept silent about his sin or covered it up, he felt as if he were wasting away, but when he confessed to the Lord, he was forgiven. The Lord's unfailing love surrounds those who trust in Him. David personally experienced God's forgiveness and mercy and wrote to encourage others to go to Him in prayer and expect mercy and forgiveness. We can trust that God will be just. But we can also expect mercy and grace. This is the heart of the Gospel. This is who our God is.

Q: What does Psalm 32 tell us to do when we sin? What does it say God will do?

Q: In what ways does covering up sin make you feel like you are "wasting away"?

Q: Describe the benefits that forgiveness brings.

CHALLENGES

THINK: In what ways or areas of your life do you struggle to trust in the Lord? Why is it hard to step out in faith and follow where He leads? How is it hard to hear His voice to even know where He is leading you? Why and how are you tempted to trust in your own strength or things in the world? How do those things ultimately fail you? What do you need to change to put all of your trust in the Lord?

PRAY for God to give you more faith. You can pray for a particular situation you're dealing with or more generally for Him to give you trust to step out in faith and follow wherever He leads, believing He is who He says He is and will provide for you, protect you, and be compassionate, merciful and loving toward you.

ACT: Confess. This week, spend time in confession before the Lord. Really open your heart to Him and pour out your soul before Him in prayer. Ask for His mercy and experience His compassion, forgiveness and love.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we will see David's heart of worship again as he purchases the land on which the temple will eventually be built. Though David sinned greatly and made many mistakes, it was his heart of worship and trust in the Lord that truly made him a man after God's own heart.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/censuses.html>

² <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/sis/resources/1950-census-ff.pdf>

³ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1–2 Samuel* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1999).

⁵ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁶ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1–2 Samuel* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1999).

⁷ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁸ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

¹⁰ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

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