2 Samuel Lesson 26 (2023)

**DAVID BUILDS AN ALTAR**

(2 Samuel 24:1-25)

Key Verse 24:25

***25*** *David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.*

Today’s passage is the last chapter of 2 Samuel. We have 26 lessons from this book, and it took us over 2 years. We have learned many valuable lessons from each message. Last week, missionary William Shin delivered a message based on Chapter 23, David’s Last Words. It may sound better if the book closes in chapter 22 or 23, David’s Song of Praise and His Last Word which is inspiring and prophetic as missionary William Shin mentioned. However, the book ends in David’s sin and judgment. When we think of David’s sin, his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah comes to mind first, because of the seriousness of the sin and its devastating impact on David, his family, and the nation Israel. In this chapter, King David issued a census, ordering Joab and his officials to enroll the fighting men in Israel. His action brought God’s judgment and it impacted the entire nation, Israel. Why did the author put this chapter at the end of the book? The chapter ends in building an altar and offering sacrifices to the Lord at the threshing floor of Araunah and God forgave the sin of the people. This place is very important to Israel because it is where King Solomon built the temple of God. It became a spiritual foundation of the nation. Even though this chapter deals with sin and God’s judgment, we can continue to learn about King David and God beyond times of victory and prosperity. May God open our hearts so we can learn valuable lessons from this passage.

***Look at verses 1-2****, Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.” 2 So the king said to Joab and the army commanders[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Samuel%2024&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8695a)*] with him, “Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.”* The author did not explain a reason, but God’s anger burned against Israel and He incited David to take a census of Israel and Judah. According 1 Chronicles 21:1, it was Satan who rose up against Israel and incited David to take the census. It seemed Satan tempted David to commit sin, but God allowed it to happen like in the case of Job. We must be aware that Satan always tries to tempt God’s people to sin by taking every opportunity. Late in David’s reign he decided to take a census. In the old days, a census was a tool centralizing power. Its purpose was to see potential for raising an army or collecting taxes. In the United States, the census is legally mediated in the US Constitution and takes place every 10 years. The first census was taken in 1790. There have been 23 censuses since that time. The most recent one was completed in 2020. The census is the leading source of information about demographics, the economy, and overall changes. The results of the census help to determine how to distribute federal funding to communities. It helps communities get their fair share for schools, hospitals, roads, and public works. Therefore, the census is a very important tool in the United States. However, David’s census was not for the purpose of serving the people better, it was to assess his military power.  According to ***Exodus 30:12****, “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them.”* If a census wasn’t taken a proper way, it could cause a calamity on the people. Taking a census was a serious matter before God because God Himself is the owner of His people.

***Look at verse 3****, 3 But Joab replied to the king, “May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?”*  Joab advised David that the census was not needed because God could provide the troops if necessary. Joab brought out a very important point to David that the nation’s strength was not by knowing how many soldiers were available but in trusting God. David was able to win the battles, not because of the number of armies, but God. It was recorded, “*The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.” (****2 Samuel 8:6,14****)* Joab and the other commanders of Israel’s army asked David to reconsider his order to take a census, but David refused to listen to them and sent them to enroll the fighting men of Israel (4). This shows how strong David’s desire was. He had already decided to do so. Why did David insist on counting the fighting men of the country against his generals’ advice? We are not sure, but there was pride in David’s heart that he depended on the number of his army, rather than God. David might have a sense of fulfillment by measuring the strength of the nation that he established. Pride is always the root of sins.

David's pride reminds us of King Nebuchadnezzar. He had a dream of an enormous tree, and its top touched the sky, but it was cut off by a messenger who came down from heaven. Daniel interpreted his dream that it was a message of God’s judgment on him. Daniel advised him to renounce his sins by doing what is right and humble himself before the living God. However, twelve months later, as he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, *he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (****Daniel 4:30****)* Despite Daniel's advice, he was caught in pride, thinking of his great accomplishments. Even as the words were on his lips, God brought judgment on him, and he lived like a wild animal, apart from all his glory and accomplishments until he acknowledged that God was sovereign over all kingdoms on earth; God is the one who gave him his kingdom.

A sense of fulfillment or accomplishment seems important to people. It promotes self-esteem and gives satisfaction to life. Therefore, people often seek external accomplishment that is visible, tangible, and measurable in life; it may be financial, academic, social, or even God’s ministry. However, relying on external accomplishment tends to make people proud or feel like a “loser” based on perceived success or failure. Moreover, it leads people away from God and His will. A sense of fulfillment is important, but it should not depend on an external achievement, but more internal and spiritual. I used to review my life based on what I have achieved in my life, but this question made my life more focused on external and visible achievement, such as getting a higher degree or pioneering a new chapter before it’s too late. However, I easily lost peace of mind and was disappointed in myself because I felt like I hadn’t achieved much in my life. I realized that my question was wrong, I must focus on a more internal and spiritual area of my life. So, I have changed my focus to “Am I being faithful to God’s calling?” and “Do I have the spirit of Christ in me?” I should focus on maturing in Christ, otherwise the external and visible achievement means nothing. Apostle Paul said in ***Philippians 3:7-8******7*** *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.* ***8*** *What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.* I believe that if we have Jesus Christ in our heart, then we can have a true sense of fulfillment in life even though we may lose everything in the world.

***Look at verses 8-9****, 8 After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.9 Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand.* The census took almost 10 months, a pretty long period. The number came out to 1.3 million fighting men. When David heard of the report, he was conscience-stricken. ***Look at verse 10,*** *10 David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.”*  David realized that he took the census against the will of God; he confessed his sin right away to the Lord and pleaded with Him to take away his guilt. It is important to point out David’s response here. When his conscience was stricken, he listened to it and prayed to the Lord right away. He hadn’t listened to Joab, but now he was ready to listen to his conscience that was struck. He was the king, he could excuse his action, but he didn’t let his position get in the way. He confessed his sin to the Lord doing such a foolish thing. ***Look at verses 11-13*** *11 Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer: 12 “Go and tell David, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.’” 13 So Gad went to David and said to him, “Shall there come on you three[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Samuel%2024&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8706b)*] years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.”* God sent his prophet Gad right after David recognized and confessed his sin this time. The Lord gave David three options: (1) three years of famine, (2) three months of fleeing from enemies, which means the nation would be under war for three months, or (3) three days of plague. Each one has a devastating impact on the nation Israel. Through David’s sins in the book of 2 Samuel, we have learned that there are consequences of sin all the time. When David repented of his sin, then God forgave him. However, he couldn’t go for free as if nothing happened, he had to go through the consequences of his sin. They were not easy for him to deal with—the sword never departed from his family, the nation went through civil war, and he had to face his sons’ deaths. The consequences of sin teach us the seriousness of sin. We never know how much our sin affects us and the people around us. It may be lifelong consequences that we have to deal with. The problem is, once we commit sin, we cannot go back to correct the past and make it so nothing happens. Therefore, we must take sin very seriously. To avoid committing sin, it is important what kind of life principles we have in our lives. If we direct our life to please oneself, then no matter how carefully we try to avoid sin, we cannot but go against God and His will. But if we change our mind to how to please God whatever we do, we are not only away from sin, but we can make choices that please God. This is one of my life principles. Even though I fail to follow this principle sometimes, I try my best to make my choices based on it, especially when I am in a complicated situation. We are making many decisions each day. We must be aware that there are consequences all the time depending on the choices we make. I pray that we make the right choice before God, so we may live a life that pleases God.

***Look at verse 14*** *14 David said to Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.”* David chose the third option because he preferred not to fall into the hands of men, but the hand of the Lord. David knew how great his sin was. At the same time, he knew how great the mercy of God is through his life experience as he praised God in ***2 Samuel 22:51****, “He shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.”* The three days of plague could bring a devastating outcome. God could have wiped out the whole nation easily. Yet, David put everything in God’s hand for he is merciful. ***Look at verses 15-16,*** *15 So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. 16 When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.” The angel of the Lord was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.* The plague affected the whole nation from Dan to Beersheba. There was moaning and weeping for the dead in every town and village in the whole nation. 70,000 men died, affecting 5% of all the fighting men counted in the census. It is a great number, but it could be worse than that. While pouring out judgment on the nation, the Lord showed his mercy to his people. The Lord relented concerning the disaster and withheld from destroying Jerusalem. He said to the destroying angel, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.”

***Look at verse 17,*** *17 When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd,[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Samuel%2024&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8710c)*] have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.”* David saw how much people suffered from the plague; his heart was broken. David called himself the shepherd and his people were sheep. He was very sorry for his people who suffered from the loss of 70,000 men. David knew that God established him as king over Israel to be a shepherd for them, caring for his people with compassion, guiding them to the way of God and providing them what they need. God exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel, not for himself (***2 Samuel 5:12***). David admitted his sin again and repented earnestly.  He wanted to take full responsibility so he would suffer instead of his people. David was called “a man after God’s own heart.” It is not because of his great victories or many achievements as a warrior and king, but his shepherd heart for his people and how he makes right with God even after committing serious sin before Him. Our ministry uses the word “shepherd” for the leaders. Some may not like this term. But Jesus calls himself the good shepherd. It is a very Biblical term and directs us on how to serve the ministry of God. If there are more shepherd minded people, the healthier the ministry. May God raise many good shepherds in this generation who are willing to follow the footstep of Jesus Christ who set up good examples as the chief shepherd.

According to verses 18-24, when God saw David’s sincere repentance and shepherd heart for his people, He sent the prophet Gad again and instructed him to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David went to the place and built an altar and offered sacrifices there. He paid the full price to Araunah saying, *“I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” (****24****)* According to 1 Chronicle 21:25, David paid Araunah six hundred shekels of gold for the site. ***Look at verse 25,*** *25 David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.* God accepted the sacrifices, burnt offerings, and fellowship offerings. Because of David and the people’s sin, they were under the wrath of God. They should all be destroyed under God’s judgment.  However, God directed David to build an altar for atoning sacrifices. Through the atoning sacrifices, God forgave the sin of David and his people and restored the relationship with them. The reconciliation between God and his people happened in this place.

***Look at 2 Chronicles 3:1 “****Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.”* It tells us about the significance of this specific spot. It was the place where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to the Lord. This is the place where the temple of God was built to offer atoning sacrifices for his people year after year. Before preparing this message, I wondered why the book of 2 Samuel ends in sin and judgment. However, it makes sense to end the book with an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people. That is what God wants to bring to his people from the creation of the world. Ultimately, God sent his one and only son Jesus Christ as a ransom sacrifice for His people. Jesus becomes the temple of God who offered himself as a perfect sacrifice, shedding his own blood as an atoning sacrifice, which is not comparable to animal sacrifices offered in the temple. ***Hebrews 9:13,14*** *reads, “13**The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.* ***14*** *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death,[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+9&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30120c)*] so that we may serve the living God!”* Furthermore, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross demonstrates God’s great love and grace for sinners like us. ***John 3:16 reads****, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* Praise God for what He has done through Jesus Christ.

I can't believe that it is already the first week of December. What comes to mind when you think of December? One significant thought is Christmas. We are going to hear Christmas messages from next week. Also, there are many events in December: Christmas united worship service, Christmas Eve children’s worship service, HBF regional retreat, and etc. At the end of the year, we may have many concerns and worries or be busy-minded, thinking of many things. However, it is most important to meditate on the meaning of Jesus' coming into the world. Once Paul pleaded to God to take away the thorn in his eyes. It was a desperate issue for him, so he earnestly pleaded to the Lord three times. But God said to him in ***2 Corinthians 12:9a****, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”* Sometimes we feel like we need many things, but the grace of Jesus Christ is what we need the most despite what situations we are in. I pray that the grace of God fill our hearts, so we may be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise God who gives us the way to reconcile with him, in and through the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen!