

Second Samuel Chapters 23-24 - John Karmelich

So how do you wrap up this book and in effect David's life? David does what David does: gives credit to God, recalls how He has blessed his life, thanked others who's made it possible, talks about mistakes he made and the punishment for it, which God still used for His glory, as it led to David purchasing the spot that became the "Temple Mount" (highest spot in that city BTW). Gee John, that's great, David is recalling how God used him for His glory and thanked others. We're not kings, so why should we care about any of this? We know the New Testament opens with the line that Jesus is the son of David, and we get that David was an important historical figure! Still why does God want us to know all these end of David's life details? How does this affect us? It's not to learn a large bunch of historical facts! If we think that, we miss the purpose of studying His Word! Notice God is the center of these stories! What I am getting at is these chapters are a reminder to keep God at the center of our life no matter what we're dealing with at any moment!

Let me explain with a few details of this story: Chapter 23 opens with David proclaiming "these are my final words". I don't think it's a death bed proclamation as much as it's David near the end of his life as he considers how God has used him. It's seven verses, not bragging about his accomplishments, but it's a series of statements to reflect on his life and how God has used him! At "the end of the day", I do not want to reflect on all my accomplishments, as life isn't ultimately about the things we did, but how God works through us to make a difference for Him! I don't want a big thank you from God or from others! All I desire is to hear Jesus say to me, "Well done good and faithful servant". That to me is the purpose of life! These first seven verses of Chapter 23 don't brag about what David accomplished. It shows his gratefulness for how God used him! What if you're thinking, "God has never used me in a great way?" First, it's not the size of our ministry, it's just our faithfulness to what He's called us to do! If you're not sure, remember we can't change our past, it's only what we learn from it. There is no greater purpose in life than to be used by God and if we do ask Him to guide us, He will for His glory!

Anyway instead of bragging about his accomplishments, David focuses on those who helped him to do what God wanted him to do. It fascinates me he didn't list say his staff, family, or other people around him! Instead David listed his best soldiers to say in effect, "Here's other people God used in a powerful way and I should mention them, because if they didn't do what they did, God could not use me to make a difference for Him!" It's another example of God using us together to make a difference for Him! I'm not going to list the names, because you could read them as easily as I can, and we still have much text to get through! I should give a few technical notes. There are three who stand out and they were listed first. Then David refers to the "30" and there's more than 30 names. Most likely, some replaced others after they died but David still wanted to give these people credit who stood out! The last name given is the man David ordered killed because he was Bathsheba's husband! I'm sure it's not out of guilt that he is listed, but he really was a great soldier and worth remembering for what he did as a soldier!

All of that leads to Chapter 24: Remember the last handful of chapters are "appendices" that the author wanted us to know! It makes sense Chapter 23 records David's last "public words" for a lack of a better term but Chapter 24 records a horrible mistake David made and the punishment for it! My first thought is why have this here? David obviously made lots of mistakes as 1st and 2nd Samuel list in detail! So why list another one here? One answer is it leads in effect perfectly to 1st Kings as that book begins to tell us how Solomon built God's temple and this chapter ends with the resolution of David's mistake as he purchases the land that became the temple site! It's an example of how God even uses our mistakes for His glory! Still the chapter lists a lot of details about this mistake (sin) and thousands of people do die because of it. (I'll explain his mistake in the next paragraph.)

This chapter opens (no continuation from Chapter 23) with a comment that Satan incited David to do a census of all of Israel in effect to see how big of an army he could raise. (1st Chronicles 21:1-6 tells us it was Satan behind this!) God allowed it even though it meant thousands of deaths, as it ultimately led to what God desired (as I'll explain in a bit!) I suspect it was ego driven or maybe David wants to prep for war! Either way, God has a set message that His land is "His problem" and the Israel kings weren't supposed to count the army size.

I'm fascinated by the fact we get eight verses (2-9) giving the details of this count! The text could have just said, all the men were counted throughout Israel and there were 1.3 million men David can use for a war. Instead, we get details of David's top general (yes Joab) traveling all over Israel to do this. Then the text said after 9 months, and 20 days Joab returned to give the head count! So again why give us all these details? All I can figure is it gave time for David to think about it, fail to repent and then he must deal with the consequences of it! I'd argue it's emphasized to remind us that God gives us time to think about our actions! Yes, it gives us clues of Israel's size at that time. Listing places in Israel is similar to what Americans do when we say, "From Maine to California" to describe the size of the United States!

Anyway, it was at the moment Joab returned (who by the way tried to talk David out of it as I think he (Joab) thought it was wrong, either that or he just didn't want to do it). Joab felt guilt carrying out that order and David realized it was wrong after it was done! As we know there are points of "too late"! (It is not about losing our salvation but realizing we must suffer for our consequences!)

The prophet Gad then told David, God is giving you three options: A three-year famine, three months of being on the run from his enemies or a three-day plague! I'd be thinking, "Is there a fourth option?" Why these three? We don't know! David figured to take the quickest one, because that one was strictly up to God, and the others would involve enemies hurting them for a significant period of time! So God allowed a plague to go over all of Israel and 70,000 deaths got recorded. It was a large enough number to remind David that the size of Israel's army is strictly God's problem! The text states neither David or his family was affected, just innocent people! That's God's way of reminding us decisions made by our leaders do affect those around us!

The good news of this strange horrid tale, is something good comes out of it! God tells David the way to stop (via the prophet named Gad) it is for David to go make an offering on what is the highest point in Jerusalem. The guy who owns that parcel obviously was afraid of the plague, let alone saying no to the king, and said in effect, "David it's yours!" David refused to do a free sacrifice (a point for all of us about supporting those on the front lines of Christian service!) and agreed to buy not only the land but also the cows and wood the landowner had there for the sacrifice. David paid 20 shekels of silver (it's about \$400 today). Bottom line, this action ended the plague and that's the end of the book!

OK, why does the book end that way? It transitions well to 1st Kings, as that place was the same place where David's son Solomon built the temple! It happens to be on Mount Moriah, the same place where Abraham offered Isaac and the same mountain that Jesus was crucified on! In spite of this strange stuff about punishment for counting people led to that being one of the most famous places on the globe for world history! I don't think this spot is where the "Dome of the Rock" is. If one looks at a topography map of Jerusalem the highest spot on that mountain is next to the Dome but not at that same spot!

OK John, that's neat ancient history! Since most of us are saved, we can watch Jesus return to that spot one day (from the balcony in heaven) when it happens! How does this apply to us now? For starters it is a reminder of when times get tough or things go wrong, realize God's still working through our lives

for His glory just as He did through David to prepare the location Jesus will rule the world from a date in the future!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! If you'd like you can read the rest or stop now. Either way, I'm grateful for you reading this. To see the other one, click on one of the two links on this web page. Thanks again, John