

## 2nd Samuel Chapters 23-24 – John Karmelich

1. We've now come to the last lesson in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. My topic for this lesson has to do with the word "impact". Let me summarize these two chapters and then come back to that topic.
  - a) In Chapter 23, David gives credit to his bravest soldiers. He names them by name.
  - b) He tells a bunch of "war stories" of bravery of a handful of these soldiers.
  - c) He then lists about 30 soldiers were also his elite guards.
  - d) Then, "that's it". Chapter 24 tells a different story.
  - e) An underlying point of Chapter 23 is that David's faith in God causes others under David to also have great faith in God. These acts of bravery are example of David's faith rubbing off on others.
    - i) David's list doesn't give any reference to any of his children, or any of his support staff. David only picks out a handful of soldiers. The purpose of this list is not to say that the soldiers are any more special than any other Israelite. The purpose is to say in effect, "These men did great things because they trusted in the God of Israel. You too, can make a difference if you're just willing to take a step in faith."
  - f) Chapter 24, the last chapter in the book is a strange, and apparently, depressing chapter:
    - i) The chapter opens with the statement in effect that God was angry with the nation of Israel for some unknown sin.
    - ii) God "influences" David to take a national census, which was is technically a sin.
    - iii) After David completes the census, he feels guilty and confesses that sin.
    - iv) God forgives David, and at the same time announces a punishment.
    - v) God gives David a "multiple-choice" option for punishment. David picks the one option where God-only can do the most damage, as opposed to mankind. Seventy thousand Israelites die from this punishment.
    - vi) A point of this chapter is God is angry at Israel and the nation suffers more than David does. God "uses" King David to punish the nation.
  - g) Now let's get back to the word "impact": How we live impacts others.
    - i) With God, when we sin "corporately" (i.e., as a nation), that sin impacts the whole nation. In Chapter 23, the faith of David "works downward" to positively affect the men under David. In Chapter 24, the sins of the nation "worked upward and back again". The corporate sins of the Israelites caused God to work through David to impact that whole nation.
  - h) The book does end on a happy note, but it is subtle:
    - i) In order to end the plague, David needs to offer sacrifices for forgiveness and for restoration of the relationship between God and Israel.
    - ii) What we discover, by doing some cross-referencing in the bible, is that David has to buy some land in order to have the spot for this offering.
    - iii) This plot of land, just "happens" to be the same hillside where Jesus was crucified. This hill is also where "the" temple was built by David's son Solomon.
    - iv) There, the book ends. It is a very subtle hint of prophecy. We'll get to that later.
  - i) Which leads us back to "impact":
    - i) David is near the end of his life in these two chapters. The final story is not a "they happily ever after" ending. If anything, it is about more problems that David has to deal with.
    - ii) Remember that David is called "a man after God's own heart." It is to David that God specifically gave the promise of a reigning Messiah to one of his descendants.
      - a) The New Testament opens with the title of Jesus as the "Son of David".

- iii) Despite these promises and titles, David's life is more tragedy and than triumph. We've been reading of martial affairs, murder, family disorders, mutinies, civil wars, famines and now a nation-wide plague in the last chapter. For a great king, this book seems more like an embarrassment than a list of accomplishments.
- j) The reason David is so highly venerated is because his faith in God throughout all of these messes impacted others:
  - i) Half of the Psalms were written by David. For almost 3,000 years, they have been read and sung by billions of people as praise to God.
  - ii) David's acts of faith through these tragedies are examples to us of how to trust God through the worse of circumstances.
  - iii) You can read David's life and think, "Gee, my life is not so bad after all." When tragedy strikes, you can read David's life and think, "I can relate to all of this pain based on what I'm going through right now".
  - iv) David is "a man after God's own heart", not because David was any better or a person than you or I. David's life was a disaster by human standards. David is an example for all of us because he never stopped trusting in God during the worse of circumstances. When David reached points in his life where he realize he messed up, he then stopped and confessed that sin and vowed to turn from that sin. David kept seeking God through all of his triumphs and his failures. That is the inspiration of David. That is the impact (there's that word again! ☺) that David has on our lives.
  - v) Other than Jesus, more is written about David than any one else in the bible. David's life is meant for us to study, not so we become experts on David's background, but so we can be inspired to have David's trust in God through whatever we are going through at any moment. That is impact!
- 2. Chapter 23, Verse 1: These are the last words of David: "The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs:
  - a) Most of Chapter 23 is a list of names of David's top soldiers. The chapter is about the impact they have made regarding their faith.
  - b) The first seven verses are an introduction. That state who is writing the words.
  - c) It's time to review how a formal letter is written in that culture:
    - i) When we write a letter today, we usually say, "Dear Sir", then we write the body of the letter, and then sign our name. If we want to state our authority, we add a line after our signature. For example, I would sign a letter as John Karmelich, President of such-and-such organization to state my authority for that letter.
    - ii) In the ancient Eastern culture, the order is "backwards":
      - a) First, one states who is writing the letter.
      - b) Next, one states their authority for writing the letter.
      - c) Finally, comes the text of the letter itself.
      - d) The letters (a.k.a., the epistles) in the New Testament follow the same style.
  - d) I say all of this as Chapter 23 follows that same pattern:
    - i) The chapter opens with "These are the last words of David". He is giving his name as the stating the author of this chapter.
    - ii) The rest of Verse 1, all the way through Verse 7 tells "who David is". He states some of the key aspects of his life to state his authority of the rest of the "letter".
    - iii) The point of this chapter is that David's faith in God impacted other soldiers and life-long comrades. David will say in effect, "God picked me. God used me. I trusted God. Here is how my life impacted others".

- e) Understand these are not David's final words in the sense that he dropped dead the moment this chapter was written. ☺
    - i) They are David's last words in the context they are the last "public" words. This is David's letter of appreciation about his loyal soldiers. It is David's last public statement to be read and circulated.
    - ii) We know they are not David's last words because in the first chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, we have David's dying words to the next king, his son Solomon.
  - f) David then calls himself, "son of Jesse" and "exalted by the Most High" in Verse 1.
    - i) To paraphrase, David is saying, "I was the son of a nobody and God called me and picked me to be a king". The emphasis is how God picked (choose) David.
    - ii) This is a good time to discuss the "pre-destiny" aspect of salvation. If we accept the fact that God is perfect, then He must be all knowing. From God's perspective of time, God "knows" who will be in heaven forever. In that sense, we as believers in God were "pre-destined" to be in heaven. There is also a free-will aspect of that equation, but I'll stop there. My point here is that David understood that he was chosen by God to do great things.
    - iii) To use a classical Christian cliché, "God don't pick no junk". If you are chosen by God, then God desires for us to have an impact for Him. We may not be literal kings on earth, but God can and does use "chosen" people to have an impact upon those around us. This chapter is just a handful of examples of people used by God in a great way. This chapter is designed to be an inspiration to others.
  - g) The next part of Verse 1 says, "The man anointed by the God of Jacob".
    - i) In Genesis 32:28, God renames Jacob "Israel". Both the terms Jacob and Israel refer to the same person and to the nation of Israel as well. The word "Israel" means, "struggle" as if one struggles with God in order to be pleasing to Him.
    - ii) When you read the life of Jacob in Genesis, it's not too impressive. ☺ The man is conniving most of his life in order to get out of situations. There is another classical religious joke that says, "If God can choose Jacob, there is hope for the rest of us". God didn't pick Jacob because of his personal attributes, God picked Jacob out of His sovereign will and because God made unconditional promises to his grandfather Abraham that God was going to work through Jacob's father Isaac and Jacob himself, despite Jacob's personality flaws.
    - iii) What's my point? If God can work through Jacob and all of his faults, then God can also work through David and his faults and you and me and our faults.
    - iv) I think David understood, ever so humbly that God picked David despite all of his faults to be used by God in a mighty way.
  - h) The last phrase of Verse 1 is "Israel's singer of songs".
    - i) I think David understood his Psalms had an impact (there's that word again ☺) on others. He understood that others would use them for worship. This will become clearer in the next verse. Speaking of which...
3. Verse 2: "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.
- a) David somehow understood that his Psalm-writing was God inspired.
  - b) How David "knew" his writing was God-inspired is unknown.
  - c) Years ago, I pondered, "How did people know which books were God-inspired and which counterfeits? How did people know which books to canonize?"
    - i) There were several points in history where church leaders got together and pondered this question. They debated, compared and decided.
    - ii) One method was consistency and accuracy. The bible is full of historical events that could be verified through archeology and outside writings.
    - iii) The final test of canonization is prophecy. Most of the bible is full of future predictions that came true centuries after those books were written.

- iv) My favorite answer to the question of canonization is that “people just knew”. Somehow, somehow, people knew they were being inspired by God and the “right books” were canonized through history as being part of the bible.
  - v) I can’t explain how David “knew”. Somehow, he did and that is what counts. After that, the fact that the books have survived, pretty much in its original text with only a very small deviation of errors is another example of God-inspired.
4. Verse 3: The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: `When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, <sup>4</sup> he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.'
- a) Here we come to the end of David describing how he was picked by God and inspired by God to have an impact for God. David spent the first three verses saying he was a “nobody” picked to be a king and God-inspired poet.
  - b) Now comes the first bit of advice David passes on as a king, “rule over men in righteousness”. What does that mean? It is about when you are called to be a leader, you must do so with a fear of God (i.e., understanding that we are accountable to God) and rule with a sense of fairness and justice for all that is under you.
    - i) In the last lesson, I quoted a verse from the prophet Micah. It bears repeating here: “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8b, NIV)
    - ii) The idea is the same in David’s statement and Micah’s. Part of our job as believing Christians is to understand we are accountable to God, and then have a healthy balance of justice and mercy in our dealing with others.
  - c) Verse 4 is a poetic epilogue to the impact of acting justly. David compares the beauty of a sunrise and a clear day after a rainstorm to the impact of a king giving good justice.
    - i) In my introduction on “impact”, I talked about “affecting those above us and below us”. Chapter 23 will deal with the acts of faith of the king impacting the people. Chapter 24 deals with the sins of the people impacting the king and his sinful actions. This principal connects with the verses here as it is talking about when the king is doing what is right, it positively impacts those under him.
    - ii) A similar idea is taught in Proverbs, “When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.” (Proverbs 29:2, NIV)
5. Verse 5: "Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?"
- a) Verse 5 is not about David being sinless. The whole book of Samuel proved that point.
  - b) Verse 5 is about David being “perfect” in the sense is he is “perfectly forgiven”. David understood that he would be in heaven one day because of God choosing Him, and not based on his own actions.
    - i) Verse 5 uses words like, “everlasting”, “arranged”, and “secured”. It is the idea that God has picked David and well, that’s that.
  - c) Let’s get back to the idea of God choosing us. Remember the cliché, “God doesn’t choose no junk”. If God picked us, then God desires to do great things through us. My point is God picks us for a reason. We may not know the reasons, but the reasons are there to be discovered. It is about making an impact in our lives for God and for others.
    - i) Verse 5 is David’s “mini-prayer” as a reminder that God did choose us and God has a desire to continue to use us. Verse 5 can apply to any believer in God as well as God. I encourage you to read Verse 5 and fill in our own name. Read Verse 5 with the confidence of knowing God choose you and works through you.
  - d) The last phrase is “grant every desire”. This is not about God giving us everything we want, but about God giving us everything He wants for us. Remember that God fulfills all prayer requests that are “His will” for us.

6. Verse 6: But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand.  
<sup>7</sup> Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie."
- a) Verses 5-7 are designed to go together like a "carrot and stick". If Verse 5 is a poetic way of saying God saves and perfects those that choose Him, Verses 6-7 are the warning verses to those who willfully choose to turn away from God.
  - b) Know that the word "thorns" in the bible are associated with sin. They are worthless parts of trees and bushes that "stick" people. David says they will be tossed out as worthless. This is a poetic comparison of the eternally condemned to worthless thorns.
  - c) Remember that Verse 8 to the end of the chapter is a list of David's mighty men with some illustrations of their faith toward God. It would be logical for David to add a few warning verses of what happens to nonbelievers.
  - d) Remember my theme of "impact": The impact of nonbelievers is a dead end. That is the point of these two verses. There are great men who have impacts on civilization, but eventually that impact will waste away. Two thousand years ago, Julius Caesar ruled the world and the apostles Peter and Paul were relatively unknown. Today, people name their children Peter and Paul. At best, they name their dog Caesar. That is a good example of long term impact for God as opposed as impact for mankind.
7. Verse 8: These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.
- a) Now we start the list of names. David starts by naming the "Top Three". These were not David's top three generals, but three individual soldiers that did such great acts of bravery and faith that David listed these three as his "Top Three".
  - b) The first guy named is Josheb-Basshebeth. Luckily, I can cut and paste his name and not have to try to pronounce it. ☺
  - c) The NIV translation also misses a phrase. The King James mentions that this guy was also known as "Adino the Eznite". There aren't you glad you knew that? ☺
    - i) We don't know what Adino the Eznite means. I suspect it would be like naming someone "Superman" or "Hercules". Adino, (the first Italian in the bible ☺) was probably some legendary figure that was an inspiration for a nickname.
  - d) The point of this verse is that this guy killed 800 soldiers in one encounter. There is a parallel verse in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 11:11 where it says the guy "only" killed 300. Obviously one of these verses is a typo. Either way, it is impressive.
  - e) We don't get the details of how this guy killed so many, just the fact he did it. Remember David is starting a list of story after story of how God can use others to accomplish his will. God wanted the Israelites to conquer their enemies and have the land to themselves.
8. Verse 9: Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, <sup>10</sup> but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.
- a) Now we have story #2 about one of the "Top Three". This is about a guy named Eleazar.
    - i) To summarize, there was a battle of the Israelites against the Philistines. Apparently, everyone retreated except this guy Eleazar. Since Eleazar was standing there by himself facing the Philistines, he turned and fought. He won the battle all by himself. The troops then returned only to strip the dead bodies.
    - ii) Can you just picture this soldier thinking, "Oh oh, I never heard the command to retreat. Now I'm here by myself. I might as well fight and see what happens". Because he trusted God, God used him to make an impact for others.

- iii) There is a great colorful line in this story. It says, Eleazar's hand "froze to the sword". It is as if he had been gripping the sword for so long, his hand became one with the sword. Eleazar couldn't let go if he wanted to. Imagine this guy with his adrenaline flowing beating everyone in battle who came at him.
  - iv) This story is another example of how God can use "one" to impact many. David was a single man, yet his life impacted millions. Here is the story of one soldier, trusting in God, being used by God to impact a victory for Israel.
9. Verse 11: Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. <sup>12</sup> But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.
- a) Now we have the third story of the "Top three". His name is Shammah.
  - b) This story is similar to "Top Guy #2". Shammah was surrounded by the enemy, and single-handedly defeated the enemy.
  - c) Notice God, and not Shammah got the credit in Verse 12 for the great victory.
  - d) This is another example of how God used a single person to make a big impact.
  - e) All 3 of the "Top 3" were guys who single handedly won a great victory.
  - f) The idea of the "Top 3" is not that "These were the 3 guys who killed the most enemies and therefore get top mention". It is about impact. All three trusted in God and were used by God to bring about great victories for Israel's behalf and not their own.
  - g) On a technical note, we don't know when these stories took place. They could have been recent battles or long ago in David's early reign or prior to David being king. My point here is that David is not singling out recent events, but specific "war stories" from David's past memory of people who have made a great impact for God.
  - h) I can't think of any greater purpose in life than to be used by God. We tend to think as great political leaders or corporate giants as something to aspire to. What God does want of us is to make an impact for Him. After a century or two, those political and business leaders are long gone and forgotten. Making an impact for God gets eternal benefits in heaven that last for an eternity.
10. Verse 13: During harvest time, three of the thirty chief men came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. <sup>14</sup> At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. <sup>15</sup> David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" <sup>16</sup> So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. <sup>17</sup> "Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" And David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty men.
- a) These four verses tell of another three guys. They are not the "Top 3" of the last verses.
  - b) Let me summarize and paraphrase the story:
    - i) David and his men were sitting around one day, in-between battles. They were probably talking about the things guys always talk about when they are alone: women, sports, toys and politics. ☺ Then comes things they miss back at home.
    - ii) It was probably a hot day. David was reminiscing from his childhood about a water-well near his home in Bethlehem that had great cool water. David then said he wished he could have some of that water.
    - iii) The problem is that well in Bethlehem was surrounded by Philistines at that time.
    - iv) Then three "mighty men" decided to give David a treat. They attacked a garrison of Philistines, (Verse 16) and brought back David some water from that well.
    - v) When David received that water, David refused to drink it and poured it out as a drink offering to God.

- c) This story is another example of “walking by faith” and trusting God.
    - i) When David was reminiscing about his favorite childhood water-well, David had no idea that the story would be an inspiration for his story to attack the enemy.
    - ii) Again, we are back to “impact”. We never know what God will use as inspiration for us to accomplish His will.
    - iii) David’s soldiers wanted David to be happy. Therefore, they did this act of bravery out of their free will. God used this incident to defeat Israel’s enemies.
  - d) The last part of the story is about David pouring out the water to God.
    - i) It is David saying in effect, “People risked their lives to get this. This is too good for me to drink. It is better if I offer this as a sacrifice to God than drink it.”
    - ii) A sacrifice to God is only valuable if it costs us something. God does not want us to give him cheap leftovers. We prove our love to God by giving of our substance, not our trash. Here was this valuable gift of water from David’s childhood well. David shows “impact” by giving that to God versus actually drinking it.
11. Verse 18: Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruiah was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. <sup>19</sup> Was he not held in greater honor than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.
- a) If you recall from some of the early chapters of Samuel, General Joab was one of three brothers. All three served as generals in some capacity in their lives. The story is about his brother named Abishai.
  - b) It says Abishai is as famous as the “Group of Three” soldiers who got the well water in the previous verses. David is saying Abishai deserves as much honor as the guys who got the well-water, although he was not part of that group.
  - c) Abishai is given credit for killing three hundred men. Again, this is about the impact of having faith in God and being used by God in a mighty way.
  - d) What is interesting to note who is not mentioned in this chapter: Joab.
    - i) Joab was famous in Israel as David’s top general. Yet, he is never listed for any mighty deed on this page. Joab did have a gift for military success.
    - ii) This chapter is about “unknown” people being used by God. In a sense, Joab already had his fame. David’s point in this chapter is to point out unknown people making a difference for God simply because they trusted in Him.
12. Verse 20: Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, who performed great exploits. He struck down two of Moab's best men. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. <sup>21</sup> And he struck down a huge Egyptian. Although the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. <sup>22</sup> Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty men. <sup>23</sup> He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.
- a) Now we have another hero named Benaiah.
    - i) Benaiah was listed for killing two of Moab’s best men. The Moabites were a neighboring tribe and an enemy of Israel.
    - ii) Benaiah killed an Egyptian by wresting a spear out of his hands and killing the Egyptian with his own spear. (Verse 21)
    - iii) Benaiah also killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day. The “snow factor” is important as one can slip easily on the ice. (Verse 20)
  - b) In summary, don’t mess with Benaiah. ☺ The last line said David put him in charge of his bodyguard. With a resume like that, I can see why David picked this guy!
  - c) This ends the stories of Chapter 23. The remainder of the chapter is a list of names. They are the “honorable mentions” among David’s mighty men.

13. Verse 24: Among the Thirty were: Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem,<sup>25</sup> Shammah the Harodite, Elikah the Harodite,<sup>26</sup> Helez the Paltite, Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa,<sup>27</sup> Abiezer from Anathoth, Mebunnai the Hushathite,<sup>28</sup> Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite,<sup>29</sup> Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite, Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin,<sup>30</sup> Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash,<sup>31</sup> Abi-Albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite,<sup>32</sup> Eliahba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen, Jonathan<sup>33</sup> son of Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite,<sup>34</sup> Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maacathite, Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,<sup>35</sup> Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite,<sup>36</sup> Igal son of Nathan from Zobah, the son of Hagri,<sup>37</sup> Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of Joab son of Zeruiah,<sup>38</sup> Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite<sup>39</sup> and Uriah the Hittite. There were thirty-seven in all.
- a) Don't worry, I won't ask you memorize this list. I can't pronounce most of them. ☺
  - b) We don't know anything about most of these people. From a worldwide perspective, here are soldiers from an obscure country and an obscure king that get their names listed in the bible for billions to read. If it were not for the heroics of these men, David would not have won his battles. From God's perspective, what we think of as "insignificant people" get mentioned for all of history for their great acts of faith.
  - c) The last line says there were "37 in all". The way you get "37 in "Thirty" is that some soldiers died and were replaced. It is as if this was a private club called the "Thirty". When one died, a new member was asked to replace him and join that club.
  - d) Notice the first word is "among". There are less than 30 names listed. David just lists the ones who are distinguished among the "30". Either that or he forgot the other's names. ☺
  - e) Also, notice Uriah the Hittite is listed among the "30". This is the guy David had killed to cover up his affair. I don't think David listed him out of guilt. The guy deserved it.
14. Chapter 24, Verse 1: 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."
- a) As we enter chapter 24, we now change stories. Let's review a little:
    - i) Chapter 22 was a Psalm of David thanking God for all of his victories.
    - ii) Chapter 23 was David giving credit to all of his top soldiers who helped him achieve those victories.
    - iii) Now in Chapter 24, the last chapter of the book, is a story of a national plague.
  - b) The story opens with the fact that God was angry at Israel, as opposed to just David.
    - i) Because God was angry at Israel, somehow, someway, David was incited to take a census of all of Israel.
    - ii) In Verse 1, you get the impression that God himself incited David to do this.
    - iii) There is a parallel passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles. It says, "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel." (1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 21:1, NIV)
    - iv) So was it God or Satan who did this? The best answer is God "permitted it." I like the illustration that goes, "God keeps Satan on a leash like a mad dog. When God wants to use Satan for His purposes, He lengthens the length of the leash".
  - c) OK, onto the next question, why is a census so bad?
    - i) You can't find a direct command by God that says you cannot take a census.
    - ii) David took a census so he could figure out how many able-body soldiers there are in all of Israel. Maybe David was preparing for battle. Maybe David was just at the end of his life and knowing that Israel had grown and prospered, David just wanted to measure the size of the Israelite kingdom.
    - iii) A dangerous sin is to stop and take credit for things that God has done. I suspect the reason this sin is so grievous is because David wanted to give himself credit for the prosperity of the nation.
    - iv) There is a similar "sin" in the book of Daniel Chapter 4. The king of Babylon, who is aware of God, gives himself credit (and not God) for the great Babylon Empire.



- a) Because that king didn't give God the credit, God made this king mentally ill for seven years (he became like a wild animal).
    - v) In both Daniel Chapter 4 and here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, it is the "sin" of taking credit for what is God's doing. The sin is even greater since David is very aware of God, very aware that God put him in charge and God built David's empire.
    - vi) David was violating the commandment to not put any other gods before the true God (Ref.: Exodus 20:3). Taking credit for God's work is a form of idolatry.
  - d) Let's get back to my opening theme of "impact".
    - i) In Chapter 23, we have war stories where David's faith in God impacted those under him. In Chapter 24, we have the sins of Israel "impacting" the king.
    - ii) Remember that God was angry with Israel, and not so much with David.
    - iii) Why God was angry at Israel is not stated. What I do find with God is, "the punishment fits the crime." God is about to allow a plague in which 70,000 die!
    - iv) What I suspect is the sin is that the nation of Israel now has a big ego. The Nation of Israel is at the height of its power. Historically, after all of David's conquests, Israel is now prosperous and at peace. It is natural to assume that the citizens now are giving themselves (or David) credit as opposed to God.
      - a) I suspect weekly synagogue attendance has decreased significantly. ☺
      - b) The way God "got their attention" was to cause David to sin.
    - v) What does all of this mean for us? It means to pray for our leaders. It also implies that when our leaders "mess up", it may be our fault (collectively, as a church) for some corporate sin, or lack of worship to God. This verse implies that when the "church" sins a group, that sin has a negative impact upon our leaders as well.
15. Verse 2: So the king said to Joab and the army commanders 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." <sup>3</sup> 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?" <sup>4</sup> The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel.
- a) In these verses, David gives the order to General Joab to take the census. David uses the army to take the census, just in case someone does not want to cooperate. ☺ After all of the murders we've read throughout 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel done by Joab, no one will mess with him.
  - b) Give General Joab a little credit here. He knew what David is doing is wrong and he had the guts to tell David to his face that this was wrong.
  - c) It is interesting to note that God, through Satan "influenced" David enough to do this thing. It shows that even the godliest man like David is no match for Satan's powers. The only way we can combat the forces of evil is through prayer.
    - i) I've always taken the view a born-again Christian cannot be demon possessed, but can certainly be influenced by demonic forces. Whenever Jesus performed an exorcism in the New Testament, you never read of that person ever being demon-possessed again. There is a big difference between "possessed" and "influenced".
  - d) These verses are the last reference to Joab in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. He dies in the first few chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings when he rebels against David's son Solomon. It is an appropriate end to a man who "murdered his way" back into power.
16. Verse 5: After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aroer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer. <sup>6</sup> They went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, and on to Dan Jaan and around toward Sidon. <sup>7</sup> Then they went toward the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah.
- a) These verses discuss the territory that Joab and his men crossed to count the people.

- i) They are included so, if you know your geography, it shows just how much territory currently exists under the reign of David. Remember that Israel was at the height of its power historically and the nation physically grew in size.
  - ii) This is another reason I suspect the “unnamed sin” that caused this census has to do with pride over success. Here the bible takes the time and trouble to mention all the places Joab and his men went to, in order to count the Israelites.
- 17. Verse 8: After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. <sup>9</sup> 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.
  - a) Here we have General Joab coming back to David and giving David the results.
  - b) The census was only of the “fighting men”. This means that Joab didn’t count every woman, child, and senior adult, only men of fighting age.
  - c) Remember that of the 12 tribes of Israel, David was of the tribe of Judah. At this time, Judah was by far the largest tribe. The census showed 800,000 men of the other tribes and 500,000 men just in the tribe of Judah. (Technically, the tribe of Benjamin is usually counted with Judah, as they were a small tribe.) If you add women and children, the population of Israel at this time was several million.
  - d) If you read the parallel passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles Chapter 21, the census numbers are different. Some argue that one of these two passages have copy errors. Others argue that the census counts are different as army soldiers and “reserves” are counted differently. Either way, it’s a relatively minor error. As I’ve stated, I believe the bible, “in its original autographs” are the word of God. Through the centuries, there have been some copying errors, but the text corruption is less than 1% of the entire bible. Almost all of the possible copyist errors are the number passages like this one. All of the controversial text has no influence on all of the major bible theological themes.
- 18. Verse 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, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."
  - a) In Verse 8, it says General Joab took over 9 months to complete this census.
  - b) Now that it is all over, now David is conscience-stricken that this is wrong.
  - c) Notice the first thing David does when he realizes it is wrong is to confess the sin to God.
- 19. Verse 11: Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: <sup>12</sup> "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.'" <sup>13</sup> So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three 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."
  - a) Let me summarize these verses:
    - i) In Verse 10, David confessed the sin of doing this census.
    - ii) In Verse 11, God spoke to a prophet named Gad in the middle of the night. The implication is that this is the night right-after David confessed his sin.
    - iii) God told Gad to give David a “multiple choice option” as punishment:
      - a) David could have either 1) 3 years of famine; 2) 3 months of being on the run from your enemies, or 3) 3 days of a plague”.
      - b) Personally, I would have asked if there was a 4<sup>th</sup> option. I would have asked, “How about just 3 minutes of a toothache or something?” ☺
  - b) Notice what God did not do: “Gee, David confessed his sin. I’ll just forgive him and let it go on with his life”. God still decided to punish David.
    - i) Part of the reason is God wanted to test David. He wanted to see how David would react to this multiple-choice quiz.

- ii) The other part is God was angry with the Nation of Israel. God worked through David to get their attention.
  - iii) This is why I suspect the national sin is pride. Imagine living somewhere in Israel. All of a sudden, some soldiers show up one day to do a census. Soon afterwards, there was a nation-wide plague. I suspect many Israelites had to make that connection. God allowed a genocidal plague to “knock down a notch” the pride of Israel over the growing size of the national kingdom.
20. Verse 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 the hands of men."
- a) Going back to God’s multiple-choice quiz, David choose “Option 3”. This was where the Nation of Israel would have three days of a plague.
  - b) The reason he choose option #3, as stated in Verse 14, is David did not want “to fall into the hands of men”. In other words, David correctly believed God would have more mercy on him and the Nation of Israel than other people would.
    - i) Option #1 was three years of famine. This would make Israel weak and be dependant upon their neighbors and their enemies for food. Remember that in Chapter 21 there was a three-year famine. David didn’t want that again.
    - ii) Option #2 was three months on the run from his enemies. Between his years being on the run from Saul and being on the run from his son Absalom (who committed mutiny), David knew what that was like and didn’t want it again.
    - iii) Option #3 was three days of a plague. This was the only option David hadn’t dealt with before. This option would mainly put the punishment-instigation on God alone and not people. David knew that God is more merciful than people.
21. Verse 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.<sup>16</sup> When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity 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.
- a) In the entire land of Israel, 70,000 people died in those three days. Stop and let that one sink in for a moment. If you didn’t die yourself, imagine seeing your spouse, your children, your siblings, your parents, or your friends die in a matter of three days.
  - b) Remember all of this began because God was angry at Israel. The reason for the anger is not stated. I’m only speculating that the reason is pride. That reason makes sense given the series of events and the specific punishment. The Nation of Israel’s was great in power and their ego probably grew a few notches. God made them aware by allowing a counting of the size of Israel, and then quickly decreasing the size of Israel by 70,000.
  - c) What’s the lesson for us? Does this mean we shouldn’t have national census taking? No, that misses the point. The danger, especially during good economic times, is to give ourselves the credit and not God. God is not anti-success. God is anti-pride. It is a sin to put anyone else in front of God, including ourselves. If we as a nation get prideful and start turning away from God, He “finds a way to get our attention again”. In this example, God used the leadership if Israel, i.e., King David to accomplish His will.
  - d) In Verse 16, it says this angel, who is in charge of the plague, “stopped short” when he was about to hit Jerusalem. The reason is not stated. That is the city where David lived.
    - i) It is as if God wanted David to experience the grief as a leader, but God didn’t want the plague to personally affect David’s family. It is a word picture of “preservation through trouble”.
  - e) The last line mentions this angel stopped at “the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite”.
    - i) A threshing floor is a flat place, usually on top of a hill where wheat is harvested.
    - ii) When wheat is cut and collected, there is a valueless part of the wheat called chaff.
      - a) The wheat was separated from the chaff by shaking the wheat in the wind.

- b) The worthless chaff was weighed less. The breeze would blow the chaff down wind and the valuable “heavy” wheat would land near the threshing floor. This wind-driven method separated the wheat from the chaff.
    - iii) This is mentioned because in a few verses, David buys this threshing floor.
    - iv) In the next Verse, David is allowed to see this angel who is causing the plague. David is standing next to this threshing floor.
- 22. Verse 17: When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family."
  - a) Before I comment on these verses, notice this is the last story in the Book of Samuel.
    - i) The book is going to end with David buying the threshing floor and giving animal sacrifices in order to end the plague.
    - ii) It is a strange way to end the book. If you and I were writing this book, the final chapter would some sort of “they lived happily ever after” ending. Instead, we read of this plague and David performing sacrifices to end the plague.
    - iii) The reason (in my humble opinion ☺) is because this last story is prophetic. It ties to the future of the Nation of Israel and the Gospel message itself.
  - b) Let me paraphrase David talking to this “death angel”: “Hey dude, ☺ why are you picking on all of those innocent people? I’m the one who ordered the census! Why aren’t I being punished? Further, this plague stopped short of Jerusalem. None of my relatives got hurt. How come I don’t personally have to suffer, other than as the king?”
    - i) Notice this “death angel” never responds. The only response is in the next verse, where the prophet Gad tells David to build an altar on that threshing floor.
  - c) Here is David, near the end of a long life. He is still a “sinner” and dealing with the consequences of sin. Sin never dies of old age. The only remedy is to look for God for eternal salvation and know that the only time we will ever be “perfect” is in heaven.
- 23. Verse 18: On that day Gad went to David and said to him, "Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."<sup>19</sup> So David went up, as the LORD had commanded through Gad.<sup>20</sup> When Araunah looked and saw the king and his men coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.
  - a) Here we have the story of David and “Araunah the Jebusite”.
    - i) Araunah owns the threshing floor where the plague stopped.
    - ii) David was told by the prophet Gad to go build an altar on this spot.
    - iii) Araunah the landowner is unaware of all of this. All he knows is that the king is approaching with his bodyguard and he bows down before the king.
- 24. Verse 21: Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" "To buy your threshing floor," David answered, "so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped."<sup>22</sup> Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood."<sup>23</sup> O king, Araunah gives all this to the king." Araunah also said to him, "May the LORD your God accept you."<sup>24</sup> But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.<sup>25</sup> David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.
  - a) Here we have the last four verses of the book. Let me summarize them for you:
    - i) David explains to Araunah that he wants to buy this threshing floor. David explains that God told him to build an altar there in order to stop the plague.
    - ii) Araunah, who is as anxious as anyone else to stop the plague, says to David in effect, “Pay? Forget payment! It’s yours! Now hurry up and build an altar before we all get killed! Here, let me give you the supplies and the animals as well!”

- iii) David responds in effect by saying, “Thanks for the gesture, but I can’t do a sacrifice that doesn’t cost me anything.” David insisted upon paying Araunah.
- iv) The parallel passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 21:25 mentions a much greater amount of money than listed here. Some believe David paid one price for the threshing floor and a larger price for the surrounding land. We don’t know, it is just speculation.
- v) David then went on to build an altar there. David sacrificed the animals and the plague was officially stopped. David was obedient to God’s commands.
- vi) On that note, the book of Samuel ends. The big question is “why this story?”
- b) I said earlier that this story of David and the threshing floor is prophetic and I meant it.
  - i) We learn in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 3:1 that this spot where David did the sacrifice is the same spot where David’s son Solomon built his temple.
  - ii) If you know your geography, the very top of that large hill (called Mount Moriah in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles) is also the spot where Jesus was crucified.
  - iii) Therefore, the “book ends prophetically”, with sacrifices that brings the punishment of sin to and end, on the same mountain where Jesus was crucified! (Doesn’t that give you the chills to think about that?!)
    - iv) You can take the word-picture a step further: The plague never reached this mountain. The punishment for sin “stopped short” at this location!
    - v) That same spot is where the Temple of Solomon was built. Centuries later, another temple was built on the same spot, known as Herod’s Temple (the one discussed in the Gospels). Jesus referred to that temple as “My Father’s House” (Luke 2:49, John 2:16).
    - vi) The book of Samuel ends “pointing prophetically” to a future sacrifice to be made to “stop the plague of sin”. It also points to the place where God’s temple did exist and will exist once again.

25. Let’s wrap this up: I can’t, in a few sentences, summarize all of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel with any great words. After a few dozen lessons on the life of David and the other characters in this book, there is too much to summarize in a few sentences.

- a) For those of you that read through the bible on a regular basis, (and those who don’t, get started! ☺), eventually, you will come back to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel.
- b) What I would ask you to remember at that point is the fact that David is a “man after God’s own heart”. As you read through these books in the future, ask yourself, and pray, Lord, show me how I can be a man or a woman after God’s own heart. Show me from David’s life how I can be more pleasing to you. Show me the lessons from David’s life that I can personally apply to my life.
  - i) Through these lessons, I have hopefully, given you many examples as such. I’m sure there are a lot more lessons that can be learned as well.
- c) David’s life opened as a young boy, a “nobody” in Israel that God choose to do great things. God picked him, and David now is studied throughout history. David’s life was full of sin from start to end. Through it, David continued to trust in God, and God used that trust mightily as well as those around him. David is my idea of “impact”.
- d) I also want to say thank you to all of you who take the time to read these lessons. I do this as a hobby, and I want to give God all the credit before another plague starts up. ☺ I want to thank you for taking the time to read it. I pray it makes an impact. Also, thanks to all of you who pray for me as I write these studies. I am positive it makes a difference!
- e) As with my other studies, the next page is an appendix listing my references.

26. Let’s pray: Father, Thank You for choosing us. Thank you for the impact you have made on our lives and the impact that You have used through us to make an impact on others. May we all continue to grow in Your love and Your grace. Our desire is to be men and women after your own heart. Help us to grow and mature as to be Your witnesses to the world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

## Supplement: Bibliography

“If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to further commentaries as listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in this study. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) and The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. “The Message” copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over the past lessons. The specific commentaries on First and Second Samuel are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to “audio” commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in Real Audio® or MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://joncourson.com>
2. Commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel by Bob Davies. They are available in Real Audio® format at [http://www.northcountrychapel.com/audio\\_studies/index.php](http://www.northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/index.php)
3. Commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel by David Guzik. It is available for free in text format. The web address is [http://www.enduringword.com/library\\_commentaries.html](http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.html).
4. Commentary On The Old Testament, Vol. 2: Joshua-2 Samuel By C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch; Accessed electronically via QuickVerse® Software, from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved. Omaha, Nebraska
5. Commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>. It is also available at <http://firefighters.org/html/library.cfm>
6. Commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel by Chuck Smith, available at The Word for Today ministries. The web address is <http://www.thewordfortoday.org/>
7. David, Great Lives Series: Volume 1 by Charles Swindoll published by W. Publishing Group, a Division of Thomas Nelson Inc (1997). ISBN: 0-8499-1382-9
8. The Defender’s Study Bible by Dr. Henry Morris World Publishing (1995) ISBN: 052910444X
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229
10. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm)
11. The Expositor’s Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every verse of the Bible. (It is available at Christian bookstores.) Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this source.
12. When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties -- Norman L. Geisler, Thomas Howe; Baker Book House 1999 (Available at Christian Bookstores.)
13. I also refer to Greg Koukl’s apologetic ministry which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org)