

2 Samuel 24 - Wrath wrapped in Mercy



Introduction

What makes a good ending to a story? What are the best or worst endings you've come across in films/books?

What are your initial impressions of 2 Samuel 24 as an ending to the books of 1 & 2 Samuel (they were originally one long book)?

Read 2 Samuel 24:1-10 - Sin and Repentance

What are we not told about Israel's sin in v1? What are we told *and not told* explicitly about David's sin? (v10)

- *Interestingly, we're not specifically told what his sin is - only that it is sin and that God is angry*

Are there clues we can use here to put together an idea of why David's actions were sinful? Do we need to know precisely or not? Why? Why not?

- *Census of fighting men - perhaps finding security and strength in human might rather than in the Lord?*
- *Israel was to be a light to nations - not seek to be super-power, but serve God and one another*
- *In the end it doesn't matter precisely what the sin is - mystery is good for us. It's enough for us to know God is just and perfect and doesn't make mistakes*

How do we make sense of what we're told in v1 that it was the Lord who incited David to undertake the census when 1 Chron 21:1 says it was Satan who incited David?

How then could David be blamed for doing what Yahweh commanded? I don't know, but I don't want to fudge the text simply to escape a theological problem. Clearly, in verse 10 David realized he had sinned. Hence the writer casts Yahweh's role in the form of a command (v. 1) and allows the developing narrative to qualify that by showing what the reality was (namely, David was responsible). Part of our problem also may be a failure to appreciate Hebrew thinking on such matters. While discussing the connection between 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 2 Samuel 24:1, Walter Kaiser put it this way:

It is also true, according to the Hebrew thinking, that whatever God permits he commits. By allowing this census-taking, God is viewed as having brought about the act. The Hebrews were not very concerned with determining secondary causes and properly attributing them to the exact cause. Under the divine providence everything ultimately was attributed to him; why not say he did it in the first place?

Davis, D. R. (2002). 2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity (p. 317). Christian Focus Publications.

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Read v10-13 - and note where David's repentance (v10) comes in the sequence of events in the chapter... Then compare that to 2 Samuel 12 - where does his repentance come in the sequence of events - what does that show us about David now in ch 24?

- *It is striking that this time, he's convicted in his heart, not by anything external - shows spiritual maturity in him*

Are we quick to repent, convicted by our hearts? Or only when confronted with sin or the consequences of your sin? What was the sequence last time you felt convicted of sin?

Read 2 Samuel 24:13-17 - Justice and Mercy

Think about the three options laid before David (v13) - how might they impact a nation seeking to consolidate its military strength and seek to be the super-power in the region?

- *Famine would lead to dependence on nations around for food, Military defeats and fleeing would deplete army and embolden nations around, Plague would kill off fighting men reducing the army and impact the economic power*

How does v14 reveal David's understanding of who God is? How does that square up to your understanding?

- *He doesn't have a one dimensional view of God - but see how central mercy is to who God is. He's willing to entrust himself and people to God's mercy*

v15 is the wrath of God being poured out - and it is terrifying - but how is it 'wrapped in mercy' as one commentator put it? (v14 and v16)

- *There's David great trust in God to be merciful AND God himself relenting and holding back*

NB - The word translated 'people' in v15 in the NIV, is actually 'Men' in the original - meaning its not indiscriminate slaughter...

We don't precisely understand or perhaps agree with God's wrath here - what can we learn from David here about letting God be God? How is he able to entrust himself and his people to the Lord? What is the difference between humbly submitting and obeying vs only going along with God when we agree with what he's doing?

- *Think of a child not wanting to obey a parent because they think they know better How are we like that with God? Why is that a bonker thing to think!?*

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Read 2 Samuel 24:18-25 - Wrath is only fully satisfied by sacrifice

Why does David refuse Aruanah's offer? What is the end result of the sacrifice?

- *No shortcuts he's going to do it properly - and sacrifice is always costly. The end result is the end of the judgement and then end of the plague*

Read Genesis 22:2 and 2 Chronicles 3:1 - what do we learn about the significance of this threshing floor?

- *This is the site Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice - and this is site Solomon built the temple - sacred place of sacrificial ritual for centuries*

How is David's plea in v17 finally answered on a hill not far from the site of this threshing floor centuries later? How do these words cast light on Jesus's words in John 10:11?

- *It's an amazing thought that this prayer lingers down the centuries until fulfilled by Jesus. The Good shepherd who lays down his life*

OPTIONAL EXTRA: Read Hebrews 7:23-38 and 10:11-14 - How and why is Jesus sacrifice and priesthood infinitely better than anything that has come before? What does that mean for us today?

What are the big things that have stayed with you from the book of 2 Samuel? If you could sum these up for yourself, what have you learned about God and our response to him? How will you be changed by these truths?