

DAVID NUMBERS ISRAEL

II Samuel 24:1–25.

LESSON 247 -- Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: “Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing” (II Samuel 24:24).

Tempted to Sin

There came a time, during the days of David, when the Children of Israel had to suffer punishment for a sin which was committed. “Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel” (I Chronicles 21:1). David yielded to this temptation. He gave orders that the Children of Israel should be counted that he might know the number. Once before the Children of Israel had been counted, but that time God had given the order (Exodus 30:11–14).

David did not give any reason for wanting the people numbered. We do not know if it was because of pride that David wanted to know how many people he ruled. We do not know if David was depending on the number of people rather than trusting in the power of the Lord to fight the battles. Whatever reason there was in David’s heart for wanting to know the number of the Children of Israel, it was sin.

Warning

David was warned not to do this thing. David gave the command to Joab, the captain of the host. Joab tried to persuade David not to have this counting done, for there was no need of it. Joab said, “Why then cloth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?” Joab tried to check David before the trespass was committed, just as the Spirit of God is faithful to warn us, and just as one’s conscience lets him know that which is wrong.

David did not take heed to the warning of his faithful friends, Joab and the captains of the host. David sent these men to count the Children of Israel. They went throughout all Israel (I Chronicles 21:4). They crossed the Jordan river to the land where Reuben and Gad had settled (Numbers 32:1–5). They traveled north and to the coast to Dan-jaan, Zidon, and Tyre — then south to Beer-sheba and Judah, counting the people as they went.

No Pleasure

For more than nine months, David’s men were busy taking a census. The work was not pleasant, because they knew that it was wrong. Finally Joab brought the number to David. We are not told that David was pleased, nor that he was satisfied, nor that the number of people was as large as he had hoped.

No doubt the knowledge of guilt took away any pleasure for David. When one sets his heart to do a certain thing, wanting his own way and stubbornly refusing to heed a warning, God sometimes permits him to have his own way. But never does one find the pleasure and satisfaction that he had expected in doing that thing.

Sin and Repentance

David knew that he had sinned. His own heart condemned him. David prayed and confessed his sin. David said unto the Lord: “I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.” David did the right thing by going to God for forgiveness. If one yields to Satan’s temptations, and sins, he loses the blessing of God. Only by repentance can he be restored to God’s favour. By confessing and forsaking his sin, and asking for forgiveness, he can receive a pardon from God. It is a good thing to seek God immediately rather than to postpone praying.

Punishment

In the morning, in answer to David’s prayer, the Lord sent the Prophet Gad to David. This was the word of the Lord: “I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.” It is most unusual for a person to be given choice of punishment, but God did that for David. There was no easy way out of this. David had sinned and had to suffer the punishment even though he had asked forgiveness.

David had his choice of seven years of famine, three months of defeat in warfare, or three days of pestilence. Any one of these three punishments would cut down the number of the Children Of Israel, and perhaps, after all, David would not know the exact number of the Children of Israel. By the sin of this one man, all the Children of Israel would suffer.

Had David chosen the seven years’ famine, no doubt he would have been spared because he was wealthy and the people would have rallied to help their king. Had David chosen three months’ warfare, it is doubtful that he would have been permitted to go to battle, because the

Children of Israel had told David: "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle that thou quench not the light of Israel" (II Samuel 21:17). In either one of these choices, undoubtedly David's life would have been spared, but many of the people would have died.

A Just God

David made a wise choice when he said: "Let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man." David knew that the ways of the Lord are just and true (Revelation 15:3). By choosing the pestilence, David would be subject to death along with the other Israelites. David preferred to put himself in the hands of the Lord, and if God saw fit to permit it, David would be smitten by the pestilence.

The judgment of God was swift. It had taken Joab and his men more than nine months to cover the land in taking the census, but in a few hours the pestilence had swept from Dan to Beer-sheba — from the north to the south of Canaan. The pestilence began that morning, and 70 thousand of the Children of Israel died, in all parts of the land except in Jerusalem. The Lord spared David and all the elders of Israel (I Chronicles 21:16).

David realised that all those Children of Israel had died because he had sinned. David was sorrowful, and suffered greatly. He said to the Lord: "I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me."

An Altar

The Prophet Gad told David to build an altar unto God in the threshing-floor of Araunah, the Jebusite. David obeyed. He went to Araunah to buy the threshing-floor to build an altar to God. Araunah wanted to give the property to the king. Araunah wanted to furnish the sacrifice and the wood for the offering along with the site. He wanted to give them to the king.

The Full Price

David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen. He said that he would not offer to God that which cost him nothing. David paid the full price. How differently some people act today. They would like to have the blessing of the Gospel but they offer the Lord little in return for eternal life. Spiritual death awaits each one who does not make a proper offering to God — the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). Many people today are not willing to pay "the full price" (I Chronicles 21:24). They do not want to give to God the things that are dear to their heart. They do not want to give to God that which costs them something. The blessing of the Lord comes to those who are willing to get rid of their sins and to give God their best — their lives, their time, and their talent.

God accepted David's offering; David was forgiven; and the plague did not take any more lives. God will accept our offerings and answer our prayer when we, like David, tell Him that we will pay the full price, that we will not offer to Him the things that belong to another, that we will not offer the things which cost us nothing. One cannot bargain with God. There are no cut rates and no bargain sales with the Lord. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is worth every consecration we must make and every effort we put forth. The benefits we receive far outnumber our efforts. (Read Mark 10:28-30.)

In the Same Place

Many years before this, God had told Abraham to give his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:1, 2). According to instructions, they went to Moriah, the same land where David now sacrificed on the threshing-floor of Araunah. We remember that God called Abraham as he was about to complete the sacrifice. Everything was in order and ready. Abraham had followed the instructions of the Lord and was about to offer his son. God proved Abraham but did not require him actually to offer his son. Abraham was willing to do what God had asked. In his heart Abraham had obeyed God. The Lord did "provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." In a thicket a ram was caught by his horns. Abraham offered the ram "for a burnt offering in the stead of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

Some time after this, during the reign of David's son Solomon, the house of the Lord was built in this same place (II Chronicles 3:1). These three events took place on Mount Moriah.

Spiritual Experiences

These three events are like the spiritual experiences one can receive. Abraham's offering on the mount in Moriah is like salvation. As it was the first altar built there, so salvation is the first step in these spiritual experiences. Our own lives cannot atone for our sins. We must accept God's Sacrifice, the Innocent One who was willing to be a substitute for us. God has provided a Sacrifice — His own Son, whose Blood was shed that our sins might be forgiven.

The altar built on Mount Moriah by David is like sanctification, the second work of grace. This experience comes after salvation, and by it one's life is purged from inbred sin. The third event on the mount in Moriah, the dedication at the time of the building of the Temple, is a type of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which comes after one is saved and sanctified. When the Temple was dedicated to the Lord, there were offerings and sacrifices, along with Solomon's prayer (II Chronicles 7:5). God answered and a fire from Heaven consumed the sacrifices (II Chronicles 7:1). The presence of the Lord so filled the place that the priests could not perform their duties.

As we study the Bible, we find that these experiences are taught in the New Testament and also are typified in the Old Testament. They are not received all at one time but are three separate experiences, like the three different events in the Bible. They are given by God as one prays, consecrating his life to God and making an offering unto the Lord. Have you received all three of these spiritual experiences?

QUESTIONS

1. How did David know that he had sinned?
2. From what three things could David choose his punishment?
3. Why did David choose a pestilence?
4. Why did David choose to fall into the hands of God?
5. How many of the Children of Israel died?
6. Who was among those spared?
7. Why did David want Araunah's threshing-floor?
8. How did David get the threshing-floor?
9. Why did David pay for it?
10. Tell two other events that happened at this place.