



## **Studies in the Life of David**

Text

Second Samuel 24:1-25

Topic

David foolishly orders a census of the army that results in a plague from God that takes the lives of 70,000 Israelites

Title

*"Census & Sensibility"*

### Introduction

Kidnapping for ransom is a common occurrence in various parts of the world. Certain cities and countries vie for the title "Kidnapping Capital of the World." Mexico is on that list having a kidnapping rate three times higher than Colombia's during its darkest period of drug violence.

In 2009 the *Los Angeles Times* named Phoenix, Arizona as America's kidnapping capital reporting that every year hundreds of ransom kidnappings occur there, virtually all associated with human and drug smuggling from Mexico.

Kidnapping for ransom is such a common occurrence throughout history that the Jewish Talmud, a collection of doctrines and laws compiled and written before the 8th Century AD by Jewish rabbis, indicates that part of a husband's marriage vows are to ransom his wife should she be kidnapped!

Ransom was also required to purchase an individual out of another institution we are mostly unfamiliar with - slavery.

Most of us live in relative safety from kidnapping and slavery. That's obviously a good thing except that we have lost an appreciation for the word 'ransom' when it's used in the Bible to describe our salvation.

Jesus said of Himself, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a **ransom** on behalf of many" (Mark 10:45).

**Every original listener would have had a very strong reaction to the word 'ransom' because everyone in Jesus' audience would have had some personal experience with either kidnapping or slavery.**

The Jews listening to Jesus would have had a further understanding of the word 'ransom.' At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, when God killed the firstborn of every house, the Jews were spared by sacrificing a lamb in place of their firstborn. It was considered a ransom. So when Jesus said He would give His life "as a ransom for many," they would have connected it with the Passover and understood He was declaring Himself "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

By now you're asking yourself, "What does any of this have to do with our text in Second Samuel twenty-four?" We will see that King David ordered a census be taken. It resulted in a plague that in three days time took the lives of 70,000 Jews.

Listen to this verse, Exodus 30:12.

Exodus 30:12 "When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a **ransom** for himself to the Lord, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.

Did you catch the use of the word "ransom?" David took a census but ignored the "ransom" price and brought upon himself and Israel the judgment God had prescribed for such blatant disobedience.

Next you should be asking, "What does any of this have to do with **us**?" Well, if you are a Christian then, according to Jesus, *you've been "ransomed" by Him!* You and I need to understand the strength of that word.

I'll organize my thoughts on this chapter around two points: #1 The Fact You Were Ransomed Should Affect The Way You Live, and #2 The Fact You Were Ransomed Should Affect The Way You Give.

## #1 The Fact You Were Ransomed Should Affect The Way You Live

(v1-15)

I want to make one simple point from these opening verses, and it is this. It is all too possible to know God and to be serving Him in a spirit of independence as if your life belonged to you rather than to the Lord Who ransomed you.

David will be our example. He was definitely a man of God and he was God's man for the job of king. Nevertheless he would number the army independently of God's command to take a census as if the men belonged to him rather than to God.

2 Samuel 24:1 Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."

The "he" of that verse is not who you might think. There is a parallel account of this episode in First Chronicles twenty-one. It opens like this:

1 Chronicles 21:1 Now **Satan** stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.

The writer of Second Samuel seemed to assume everyone would understand the "he" of verse one was Satan and that it could not be God since He tempts no one to do evil.

Commenting on this William MacDonald writes, "Satan *precipitated* it, David *performed* it... and God *permitted* it." God would use Satan to discipline David and Israel by permitting him to "move" David to take a census.

2 Samuel 24:2 So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people."

The verse is written to indicate this was David's idea; God had not ordered a census. We are familiar with census taking and might think, "What's the big deal?" The 'big deal' is at least two things:

1. For one thing, numbering the people of Israel was seen as an act of ownership. Since God had ransomed them, He owned them and only He could order them counted.
2. For a second thing, we read in Exodus 30:12 that whenever they were counted a "ransom" was to be paid to acknowledge that they belonged to God.

Notice, too, that David was only interested in counting soldiers. His concern was with the relative military might or weakness of Israel.

2 Samuel 24:3 And Joab said to the king, "Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?"

Joab was David's commander. He was not really very spiritual, which makes it all the more meaningful that even he could see this was a bad idea. His words indicate the census was being motivated by either David's fear or pride - fear at having too few men or pride at having built his original army of 400 misfits into something much greater.

Joab calls the census "this thing." For the next almost ten months all of Israel would be concentrated on the census - all the efforts and energies of the army and the civilians. All on something God had not ordered and did not desire that could be called "this thing" that David had concocted.

*God forbid our serving the Lord would be "this thing" we have concocted rather than the discovery of His will for our lives!*

2 Samuel 24:4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army. Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel.

2 Samuel 24:5 And they crossed over the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the town which is in the midst of the ravine of Gad, and toward Jazer.

2 Samuel 24:6 Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim Hodshi; they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon;

2 Samuel 24:7 and they came to the stronghold of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites. Then they went out to South Judah as far as Beersheba.

2 Samuel 24:8 So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

2 Samuel 24:9 Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king. And there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

I feel obligated to mention that in the parallel account in First Chronicles different numbers are given. Scholars have suggested several different likely solutions to what might initially seem a contradiction. It is *not* a contradiction.

2 Samuel 24:10 And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."

David did not accuse God of tricking him or tempting him. He didn't object that God had permitted Satan to stand up against Israel and influence David to take the sinful census.

No, David recognized that it was his sin and that he was personally responsible. God permitted David to do what was in his heart in order to show him what was in his heart and bring him to repentance.

Is your heart convicting you about something? *Then repent of it!*

2 Samuel 24:11 Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

2 Samuel 24:12 "Go and tell David, 'Thus says the Lord: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you." ' "

2 Samuel 24:13 So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me."

2 Samuel 24:14 And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

2 Samuel 24:15 So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till the appointed time. From Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men of the people died.

When we confess our sin, God immediately and eternally forgives us our sin. But our sin may have temporary consequences on the earth. David's did and they were severe.

David chose a consequence that would first of all put him and Israel into the Lord's hands rather than the hands of their enemies. Secondly, it was the shortest of the time periods. Thirdly, it was the only consequence that also exposed David and his family to potential harm. (Chances were that neither an extended famine or defeat by enemies would really affect palace life. But a plague was indiscriminate). And, fourthly, it was the penalty that God warned would attend any census that failed to collect the required ransom.

God did not need the ransom money. It wasn't much, anyway - only a half-shekel per man. It was a token to remind everyone that they were a ransomed people who had been slaves to sin but were now set free to serve the Lord as He prescribed.

They had been ransomed by the blood of lambs when God required the death of the firstborn. The half-shekel reminded of that blood from the original Passover and it pointed to the blood of the Lamb to come - Jesus, our Passover.

What's more the price indicated that this was a universal provision for the universal problem of sin. Rich or poor, all were on equal ground. Ransom had to be paid by God - which He did in sending His Son to die on Calvary's Cross.

Our application, remember, is that it is all too possible to know God and to be serving Him in a spirit of independence as if your life belonged to you rather than to the Lord Who ransomed you.

You and I were slaves to sin, headed for death. Satan held us captive. The Lord bought us out from that slavery. He gave His life a ransom for us and whosoever would believe on Him. We therefore belong to Him.

We believe we belong to Him **but do we really live like we do?** The course of our life, is it the one chosen for us by God? Or did we choose it and are now merely ask Him to bless us along our way?

I'd like to think most of us *are* on the path the Lord chose for us. Even so, along that path are we serving Him? Or are we doing "this thing" or "that thing" of our own desire?

Here's one test for all of us. When's the last time you did something radical that God was asking you to do? I mean, you can't read too far into the Gospels or the Book of Acts without seeing God call upon His followers to do something radical.

Not foolish; *radical*. If we aren't doing anything like that, or it's been a long, long time, perhaps we need to consider that we are *counting* and *counting on* His blessings but living to please ourselves.

Instead let's get back to asking the Lord to reveal His plans so we might walk in them.

## #2 The Fact You Were Ransomed Should Affect The Way You Give

(v16-25)

Again I have one very simple point to make from this section. **When I am living as I ought to be, it will be reflected in my attitude toward giving to the Lord.**

2 Samuel 24:16 And when the angel stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah [A-ron-ah] the Jebusite.

2 Samuel 24:17 Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."

2 Samuel 24:18 And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

2 Samuel 24:19 So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded.

David asked the Lord why He was destroying the people of Israel when it was he and his house who were guilty. God's reply, given through Gad, was for David to “erect an altar... on the threshing floor of Araunah.”

It wasn't really an answer so much as it was a command. **God may not directly answer you when you seek Him but if you will obey Him you will discover His deeper purposes.**

2 Samuel 24:20 Now Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming toward him. So Araunah went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground.

2 Samuel 24:21 Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people."

2 Samuel 24:22 Now Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever seems good to him. Look, here are oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements and the yokes of the oxen for wood.

2 Samuel 24:23 All these, O king, Araunah has given to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you."

2 Samuel 24:24 Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

2 Samuel 24:25 And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.

OK, so if the bottom line, the take-home lesson, is “nor will I offer... to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing,” the spiritual question to ask myself is, “What is it costing **me** to serve the Lord?”

There are a few Araunah's in the body of Christ. They generously give of their time, their talent, their finances.

**But there are also those who are perfectly willing to ride along on the offerings of the Araunah's!** Unlike David, there are those who say, by their action (or inaction), “Great! Why should it cost *me* anything if you are willing to sacrifice?”



**It must cost you something because it cost God everything to ransom you, save you!**

Araunah's threshingfloor was located on Mount Moriah. It was the place Abraham had climbed to with his son, Isaac, to offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord. It was there Abraham would understand what it cost for God to ransom him, to save him.

God stayed Abraham's hand from actually killing Isaac. Instead He provided Himself a ram in the place of Isaac.

But He also literally would provide **Himself**. It was in this same area, this same set of hills, that Jesus Christ would be crucified. It was there He would be offered as the final Lamb sufficient to save all who trust in Him for eternal life. It was there Jesus died for you.

Let me close this part, about our giving, by saying this: You and I are supposed to be encouraged by both Araunah's generosity and David's philosophy.

- Be an Araunah - someone who is always ready to give because it's good, because you understand you've been ransomed and everything you have really does belong to God anyway.
- Be a David - not 'pre-census' but after he had come to his senses. Someone who is joyful in the realization that a ransomed person takes every opportunity to sacrifice time, talents, and monies to the Lord Who bought them.