



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

DISGUISED MERCY • God Grants Forgiveness in the Midst of Wrath

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

2 Samuel 24:1-25

This is the final chapter of our study on 2 Samuel. This book has taken some wild and crazy turns and there is one more before it closes. Think about your life as you prepare to lead this study and ask, “Are there sins in my life where I am tempted to blame God for what I have done?” In our passage, the Lord causes David to do something that is evil. How can this be? It is all a part of God’s master plan to use wrath to display His matchless mercy on David and Israel. This passage teaches that God is sovereign over all things and that He uses His sovereignty in a way that will bring Himself glory and provide mercy for His people.

David Takes a Census (24:1-9)

When a chapter starts off, “Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel,” it’s never a good thing. When God gets mad, He means business. The Israelites did something to anger the Lord, but we don’t know what for sure. Because God is angry, He “incited David against them, saying, ‘Go number Israel and Judah.’” This seems odd of God to do. If we flip ahead a few books to 1 Chronicles 21:1 we read, “Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.” Aha! There it is. Whew, God is off the hook. Not so fast. We know that Satan cannot do anything more powerful than God. Remember, Satan is not God’s equal-opposite. Enemy, yes. Equal, never! How do we interpret this, then? The Hebrew word for incite means “to entice, instigate.” But, we know that God cannot tempt people (James 1:12-13). However, God’s ultimate goal in the universe is to display His glory in this situation. He wants Himself to be glorified in the giving of mercy to David and Israel. And so, because God is sovereign over all creation, He can cause things to happen that would be wrong for us to do, but are not wrong for God Himself to cause. For example, it would be wrong for us to flood the world (which we couldn’t do anyway) and kill every living thing, but it was not wrong for God to do in order to punish sin. God is not the author of evil, but the Bible does teach that the wicked acts of men are not outside His determination (see Ex. 4:21; 1 Sam. 2:25; and read 1 Kg. 22:20-23; Job 1:12; Ez. 14:9; Acts 4:27-28). Remember, God is working for the ultimate good of those who love Him and for His own glory (Is. 42:8; Rom. 8:28; 11:36).

The Lord Judges David’s Sin (24:10-17)

As soon as the census is taken, David knows he is guilty. “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly” (v. 10). Notice that even though the

What’s the Big Idea?

When David sins against God by taking a census, God expresses wrath against Israel but also shows mercy. He tenderly wraps wrath in mercy to preserve the well-being of His people. This passage shows that God is truly a good God, who desires to forgive and love His people.

What’s the Problem?

Because we are not always in step with God’s ways, our hearts take their own selfish path toward foolishness and evil.



Lord “incited” David to take a census, David takes responsibility for his actions. Even though the Bible teaches that man’s wicked acts are not outside of God’s determination, the Bible never makes it okay for us to blame Him for evil. God is not a sinner. If He was, He wouldn’t be God!

As far as the punishment goes for David’s sin, God gives David a choice. Don’t you wish that was always the case? God gives David three situations through the prophet Gad and lets David choose. God will either 1) Strike the land with famine; 2) Cause David to flee and be pursued by enemies; or 3) Send pestilence into the land for three days. David responds with great humility, wisdom and honor for the Lord. He says, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man” (v. 14). David understands that he serves a very demanding God who justifiably punishes people for their sin. David also knows that God, unlike man, is slow to anger, merciful and gracious and abounding in lovingkindness (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; etc.). God takes His wrath out on Israel for David’s sin, killing 70,000 men. David, still overcome with grief, cries out, “Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father’s house” (v. 17). This expresses David’s repentant heart. The mark of a God-follower is not perfection; it is hating sin and seeking to defeat it by God’s power.

God’s Mercy on David (24:18-25)

After David confesses and repents, he is given an opportunity to seek the LORD’s forgiveness. David went to Araunah’s threshing floor to make his offerings and Araunah tried to give David the oxen for free. David knew that cheap sacrifices would not be honoring to God. “I will not offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (v. 24). May your group understand that our lives are to be living sacrifices to the Lord (Rom. 12:1) and that there will be costly sacrifices along the way. It’s through this lens that we should look to God, who provided the greatest, costliest sacrifice by giving up His only Son so that we might receive mercy and grace.

Conclusion of 2 Samuel

The book ends with a verse that sums up most of 2 Samuel. Verse 25b says, “So the LORD responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.” Isn’t that amazing about this gracious God? He always responds to His people that they might rest in His goodness. This chapter, as is the whole book, is a call to run to God for mercy and urge others to do the same. Instead of seeing this book as a series of moral directives or cool stories, we must dig to find its deeper meaning. Second Samuel calls us to look forward to the perfect Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the ultimate King of God’s people. John Newton, the writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” once said, “Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly: I’m a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.” Pray that the Lord would move in the hearts of your students so that they might come to this understanding and embrace the reality that we are in need of a hero to champion our sinful hearts. Jesus is that hero. Praise God!

What’s Our Response?

Fear God, flee to His merciful heart and call others to do the same.

What Are the Questions?

2 Samuel 24:1-25

LAUNCH

Someone has said we tend to blame God for our problems and take the credit for our successes. What do you think of this statement? If you think it's true, why do you think so?

EXPLORE

Read 2 Samuel 24:1-15.

1. Describe the setting of this narrative in your own words.
2. What do David's commanders think of David's command to order the census?
3. What happens with David after the census is completed?
4. How does God respond to David through the prophet Gad?
5. What drives David's decision in choosing his retribution?
6. What happens as God unleashes his wrath?

Read 2 Samuel 24:17-25.

8. How does David's plea to God seem to relate to God's decision to stop pouring out His wrath?
9. What does Gad tell David to do in verse 18?
10. What happens between David and Araunah in verses 19-24?
11. Describe the resolution of the narrative in your own words.
12. David's experience with God shows mercy triumphing over judgment (see James 2:13). We see the same thing in God's relation to us through Christ. How does this dynamic in God's character incline you to trust God, even when you don't understand what He's doing in your life?

Read 2 Samuel 24:16.

7. How does God express mercy at the turning point of this narrative?

APPLY

13. Read 2 Samuel 22:31 and Isaiah 55:8-9. How do these words give perspective on a God who expresses anger against His people but doesn't explain why?
14. Read Romans 5:8-9. How is God's response to us in Christ a more beautiful expression of the wrath wrapped in mercy we see in 2 Samuel 24?
15. Read Hebrews 13:10-13. How does the necessity of an altar in David's situation look forward to the ultimate necessity of the altar we have because of Christ?
16. What steps can you take to grow in the kind of steadfast confidence in God's mercy that David expresses in this passage?
17. How does God's way of wrapping wrath in mercy affect the way you relate to the people in your life that need to know God's mercy expressed in Christ?

What Are the Answers?

1. God's anger burns against Israel, inciting David to take a census of the people.
2. They question the wisdom of David's decision but comply with his order.
3. His heart is troubled, so he talks to God and says he has sinned greatly by ordering the census. He asks God to take away his iniquity and confesses that he has acted foolishly.
4. God speaks through Gad, offering him possible retributions from which to choose: seven years of famine, three months of war, or three days of pestilence.
5. David's conviction that God is merciful drives him to pick a retribution that results in God dealing with Israel directly, not through human means.
6. The pestilence kills 70,000 men throughout the nation.
7. He relents from the wrath He is pouring out on Israel.
8. Verses 17 and 25 indicate that God relents in response to David's prayer.
9. He commands him to build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.
10. David approaches Araunah to buy his threshing floor so that he can build an altar to the LORD there. Araunah wants to give it to him at no charge, but David refuses because it's not right to offer sacrifices to God that cost him nothing.
11. God was moved by prayer for the land, and He held back the plague from Israel.
12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. These verses remind us that God doesn't owe us an explanation for everything He does and that He remains righteous and just, even if we don't understand the way He chooses to express Himself.
14. We deserve an infinitely more intense expression of God's wrath than dying of pestilence, but God provides Christ to show His mercy on us and save us from something infinitely worse than pestilence or physical death.
15. God's requirement of an altar and to satisfy His wrath in David's day looks forward to the requirement of Christ's death to ultimately satisfy God's wrath for the sins of His people.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

2 Samuel 24:14

Cru.Comm is the small group material for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this study. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org