

November 19

Scriptures: Read 2 Samuel 24

Key Verse: “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 24:14)

Overview

The book of second Samuel closes with a tragedy that came because of sin. The Lord’s anger may have been aroused against Israel because they rebelled against His anointed one, David (under Absalom and Sheba). This was really a rebellion against God, since He had chosen David to be king. At the same time, God was testing David’s faith to see if he had any rebellion in his own heart.

God allowed David to be tempted into taking a census of the whole nation (24:1; cf. 1 Chronicles 21:1). The taking of the census itself was not the sin, for twice before a census had been ordered by God (Numbers 1:2; 26:2). It was the motivation behind taking the census which was wrong. David was probably tempted with pride, self-glory, and trust in his military strength rather than God. Joab, trying to convince David that a census was unnecessary, wisely suggested that their numbers did not matter (24:3). If God was with them, He would give the victory, no matter how outnumbered they might be. Joab, as the commander of the army, had probably experienced this many times.

Although he did not agree with David, Joab obeyed him. In just under ten months, the count was brought before David. There were close to a million and a half fighting men, and the total population of Israel would have been about six to eight million.

Immediately after the census, and even before the coming of the prophet Gad, David was already feeling guilty. His conscience condemned him with the realization that he had sinned. His genuinely repented and confessed his sin, yet it gave rise to a collective punishment, the purpose of which was to bring Israel back to God. Rather than suffering from famine or war, David chose the last of the three punishments — a plague (24:13). He knew that God was forgiving and merciful, more than any man (Luke 1:50, 54-55; Psalms 25:6; 28:6; Proverbs 28:13).

David saw the death angel by the threshing floor of Araunah (cf. 1 Chronicles 21:16), just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. On this same site, Solomon later built the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). Araunah was not an Israelite but a Jebusite-Canaanite who feared the God of Israel and probably served Him. His desire to give the land and oxen were commendable, yet it was also commendable for David to refuse. If he did not pay for anything, the offering would not really be his own, but God required the offering to come from David (24:23-24). A true sacrifice has to cost the worshipper something.

Within just one day, the plague killed seventy thousand people, but with the atonement made by the offerings and the intercessory prayers of David, the Lord stayed the hand of the death angel. Imagine how many more would have died if David had not obeyed God or interceded on behalf of his people.

Although David was imperfect and tempted with sin like any human, his heart was never hardened toward God, and he sincerely repented. Because God saw David's tenderness of spirit and his desire to serve Him, He honoured him and called him a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22-23).

Prayer

Lord, help us keep our hearts tender before You, Keep us from the presumption of making decisions which we have not thoroughly checked out with You and Your wise counsellors. Thank You for Your gift of free choice. May all our choices be pleasing to You.