

Redemptive Failure | Fall and Rise of the House of David

A Matter of Security (The Hand of the Lord)

Second Samuel 24.1-16

10.23.22

(2 Sam. 24.1-16) Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." ² The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people." ³ But Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king *still* see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" ⁴ Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to register the people of Israel. ⁵ They crossed the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the city that is in the middle of the valley of Gad and toward Jazer. ⁶ Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi, and they came to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon, ⁷ and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and of the Canaanites, and they went out to the south of Judah, to Beersheba. ⁸ So when they had gone about through the whole land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. ⁹ And Joab gave the number of the registration 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.

¹⁰ Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly." ¹¹ When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹² "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the LORD says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you.'"" ¹³ So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to Him who sent me." ¹⁴ Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

¹⁵ So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. ¹⁶ When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax your hand!" And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

We've been looking at what is MAYBE the most complete and thorough biography that has come to us from antiquity – the life of David, second king of Israel.

The first king, the people's choice, was Saul. When the people clamored for a king saying "Give us a king like all the neighboring nations have", the Prophet Samuel told them that they were rejecting God as King and the kind of king they wanted would TAKE. That's what the Gentile nations all had – kings who were

worshiped as gods. They were kings who helped themselves to the wealth of the people, to their lands and livestock and even to their children who'd be servants and tools of the kings who TAKE. The kind of king they wanted.

David, the second human king of Israel, was to be a very different kind of king. He was to be more like God's Prime Minister – God is the King who gives and David was to implement God's gracious, generous will for His people. And David stumbled... and his house was shaken but in the final chapters of these books, David rises again. He's the ideal king IN THAT he's humble and he repents even when no prophet tells him to repent.

The passage has some rather obvious mysteries– there are three difficulties in the first verse alone (which we'll address... a little) but the big idea is this matter of security. How do we get and maintain safety, well-being, stability, protection in a world (as we saw last week) that's fallen, broken and dangerous?

Last week, David had a craving (for HOME) and this week David has an idea for establishing his house and legacy...and guaranteeing the security of the nation. But David's idea is a bad one...for reasons that may not be obvious to us... So, let's look at this quest for security:

- 1) **David's Sin**
- 2) **David's Dreadful Decision**
- 3) **The Hand of the Lord (the security we need)**

The sin David commits is stated in the innocuous words, "Go number Israel and Judah." He wants to conduct a national census – a count of his citizens. He does this apparently because God is angry against Israel and the show of that anger stirred David to number the people. What's going on here?

Well, we're not told why God was angry. It could have been that the people never repented for siding with Absalom and his revolt – they turned against God's chosen king...and never faced that sin. And maybe, for that reason, God was stirring up opposition from the neighboring nations against Israel. Maybe there was some "saber-rattling" and Israel saw the troops amassing on their borders and it looked like war was coming. (Could be? But it's really just a guess.)

But did God mean to incite or inspire sin in David?

The New Testament Book of James makes a clear statement: *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I'm being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (1.13)"* And the parallel account of today's text in 1st Chronicles says that it was the Satan who tempted David... So, putting it all together, we might be safe to say that God's anger against Israel was used by Satan to tempt David and David took the bait!

Again, the NT Book of James delves into the depths of human motivation and pictures the process by which EVIL materializes in the human psyche.

James uses the image of biological conception and gestation and birth. It's as if evil and sin begins like a dragon egg in the soul. (QUOTE) *"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth*

death." (1.14-16) And David's sin follows this progression. In fact, maybe it's not coincidental that it took NINE MONTHS (v.8) to complete the census.

So, let's look at David's costly sin in its stages of growth. If this is chronological, David's back on the throne but the vote of confidence from the people was sort of weak. He may wonder whether he has the heart of the citizens. He also looks around and sees all the pagan, Gentile nations posturing and threatening and David wonders if there will soon be an attack. And he senses that he has to DO something!

"We'd better find a way to protect ourselves AND future generations too... because if we don't defend ourselves...WHO WILL?"

David, as we've seen, lives the God-drenched life and yet here... it's as if he's forgotten about God and NOW it's all about David and what HE CAN DO to safeguard his reign and his legacy. This is NOT a case in which David asks, "What is God calling us to be and to do? Why does God want our attention? What does He want us to see? How can we respond to Him in trust and humility and repentance? Let's get to the roots!"

Instead, he wants to fix the apparent consequences and symptoms he can see and measure and control. THIS is really the essence of David's sin. He's trying to give the people what they expect from a king in the Ancient Near East. To give the people something impressive to behold, something that will allay their fears and make them feel confident in his leadership. He will draft/conscript a standing army and all will be well. He'll take their sons and the nation will be secure...his legacy will remain. David's living by sight. He's engineering security apart from trusting God.

Later, the Prophet Isaiah writes, "*In repentance and rest is your salvation. In quietness and trust is your strength BUT YOU WOULD HAVE NONE OF IT.*" (30.8) David skips over the deeper things and just wants to fix the apparent problem. So, from that essence, the natural desire for security and the effort to manage it, David avoids God, avoids trust and takes matters into his own hands (sort of like Absalom had done!)

And now, sin is conceived. David invents something never before seen in Israel, a standing army. He takes their sons and their husbands and fathers.

Joab, the military leader, tries to dissuade David from doing this thing (Joab sees it for what it is). It's like Joab's saying, "David, don't do this. It's turning away from God. It's treating God as if He's NOT trustworthy and not enough. Lead the people in repentance and trust!"

But WE want what WE want – David (and we) want something we can see and touch, something to brag about... and control. So David ignores Joab. And he actually puts Joab in charge of drafting an army – it's a recruitment campaign.

And nine months later, the dragon-egg hatches and the dragon is pregnant with Death. Says James, *"Then when over-desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."* (Jas. 1.15)

When David gets the big numbers, he concedes that he's made a grave mistake. This time there's no prophet to confront him but he says the same words he'd once said to the prophet Nathan, "Now David's heart troubled him after he'd numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.'" (v. 10)

He led the people away from trusting God and away from humility and repentance.

The next morning, David's chaplain comes to him with this dreadful choice: seven years of famine (having to import food from bad nations and bad men) OR three months of flight from his enemies (again, at the mercy of bad/unreliable men) OR three days of plague directly from God.

And it's not the shorter duration that informs David's decision; it's a choice based on the character of God. David now returns to the God-drenched life. Eugene Peterson said, "David doesn't always obey God but he always DEALS with God." (*First and Second Samuel* p. 264) And now David is back to dealing with God. His decision is a return to trust and it is ITSELF evidence of repentance.

Then David said to Gad (the chaplain), *"I'm in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."* (v. 14) See? David's finished dealing with unreliable men – you may think you can control people or things and therefore relying on an army you can see is better than trusting a God you CAN'T see and CAN'T control but there's only one source of security and that is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." (1 Tim. 1.17 KJV)

And you might be thinking, "Um, thanks but I'm a woman of science and faced with the choice to trust people I can see or technology or security systems or the Securities and Exchange Commission or solutions I can achieve with my own brain and my own hands...OR to trust some invisible God – sorry, I'll stick with what I can see and manage."

But the great news I have for scientific people (and BTW – science can't tell you what the meaning of life is, the purpose of life – WHY you're even HERE!) but the good news for modern DOERS and FIXERS and solution-driven controllers like you and I is that the invisible God... came out into the open. The hand of the Lord into which David fell was bared in the sight of all nations. (Isa 52.10) The infinite, eternal, unchangeable God became visible in the Man, Jesus of Nazareth: "He" wrote the Apostle Paul, (Jesus Christ) *"is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him."* (Col. 1.15-16)

Jesus Christ, the unique, only physical expression of God, the incarnation of God, He came into the world to BE our security. He lived the life I failed to live and died the death I deserved to die. He's the mercy of

God made visible. He is God and the only true Source of security. AND He is Man...and AS a truly human Person He faced all the things that make us feel insecure.

And finally, He faced our ultimate insecurity: judgment. He took our sins in His sinless hands – He took the blame for everyone who trusts Him...and those sinless hands were fixed to a beam and He was lifted up to take the justice that David and I deserve – the wrath of the Father came down on Him in order that I might know mercy. He became insecure that I might be secure.

And with His dying breath, He spoke to God the Father “And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.” (Lk. 23.46)

To fall into His hands is to fall into forgiveness and mercy. “Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great.”

David said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned... but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house." (v.17) But Jesus Christ, David's descendent says, "Behold it is THESE sheep who've sinned but please let Your hand be against Me."

In His resurrection, our invisible Source of security became visible as if to say, “See! I’m alive and I’ve taken away the enemies you fear most – judgment and death - *"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."* (Rev. 1.17-18)

Now, is any of this to say that I can't install a security system at my condo or that I shouldn't take Social Security... Well, *"All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable..."* (1 Cor. 10.23)

IF you can use something (like a seat-belt; medication) and receive it as a gift from God – do it! If the thing is sinful in itself don't do it. AND if a good thing becomes an ultimate thing...something you must have to feel good about life and about yourself... something, (although you'd never say this), something you'd rather have than GOD, don't do it (that dragon egg is death).

And whenever these lesser things that we don't actually NEED (what we really NEED is pretty little – “For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.” 1 Tim. 6.7-8) but when even things like health or finances are in jeopardy or we're shaken by a crime or by marital trouble – we have to get into the habit of asking, “How can I use this disruption to turn TO God in a deeper way and to find my security IN HIM?”

How can this present INsecurity lead me into repentance and trust so that I see my real security was not won by an army... but WON BY ONE.

The most important pursuit in this life is NOT the pursuit of safety and security – it's the pursuit of God and His reign over my life (the Kingdom of God) – and that Kingdom comes as we trust Him who lost His security in order to give us an unshakable security, so, *"Let us now fall into the (nail-scarred) hand of the LORD for His mercies are great..."*