

Introduction

Mark's brother-in-law cooking chicken pot pie without the tin and pizza without taking it off the cardboard—doing the right thing by trying to cook his own dinner but doing the wrong way by not following directions

1. Biblical examples of doing the right thing the wrong way:
 - a. Cain's sacrifice
 - b. Abraham and Sarah trying to fulfill God's promise through Hagar
 - c. Jacob and Rebekah deceiving Isaac in order to get Esau's inheritance
 - d. David using a cart to transport the ark
2. What do each of these have in common? Attempting to do the right thing but ignoring the Lord's commands or instructions
3. Today we have another example and it has deadly consequences

A. David sins against the Lord by taking an improper census (READ 1-9)

1. There are some differences between v.1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 (the parallel passage):
 - a. Here it says that God was angry with Israel and that it caused David to conduct a census (some translations say "he" meaning God caused David to conduct the census, but the form is best understood here as neuter rather than masculine)
 - b. In 1 Chronicles 21:1 it says, "**Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.**"
 - 1) The Hebrew word for Satan here is simple "**adversary**"
 - 2) In most instances in the OT where it does not have the definite article "the", it refers to adversary in the general sense
 - 3) When used of Satan it almost always (all but two cases) has the definite article: "The Adversary"
 - 4) Since the definite article is not used here, an alternative rendering would be "an adversary rose up against Israel" meaning an enemy
 - c. When we combine these two passages, it suggests that the Lord may have been angry with Israel for some undisclosed sin, rose up an enemy against them as a form of judgment, and this ultimately caused David to respond by ordering a military census to see how many men could fight
2. David's actions were clearly sin:
 - a. Joab tries to persuade David not to take the census (24:3)
 - b. in 1 Chronicles 21:3 (READ) Joab refers to it as a "**cause of guilt to Israel**"
 - c. 1 Chronicles 21:7 (READ) says the Lord was "**displeased**" with David's actions
 - d. David himself confesses his actions as sin in 2 Samuel 24:10 and 17 (READ)
3. Why was the Lord displeased with David's actions? It's not clear and there is no consensus among scholars, but there are some clues:

- a. God gave specific instructions for conducting military censuses (Exodus 30:11-16):
 - 1) Only men were to be counted, and only those 20 years or older that were able to go out to war (this would exclude the elderly)
 - 2) All the tribes with the exception of the Levites were to be included (Numbers 1:47-49)
 - 3) Everyone who was counted was required to give a half shekel as a contribution to the Lord (14) in order to make atonement for themselves (15)
 - 4) The money was to be used in the service of the tent of meeting/tabernacle
 - 5) If the census was not conducted per these rules, the penalty would be a plague among the soldiers (12)

- b. There are four other military censuses mentioned in the OT and the Lord didn't seem to have a problem with any of them except David's
 - 1) God commanded a census at the beginning of Israel's second year in the wilderness (Numbers 1:1-2)
 - 2) He commanded a second at the end of the wandering in the wilderness right before Israel went into the Promise land (Numbers 26:1-4)
 - 3) The military commanders took a census of the soldiers after the defeat of the Midianites in order to divide the spoil as God had commanded (Numbers 31:48-50)—each soldier gave an offering from the spoils to the Lord (50)
 - 4) King Amaziah conducted a census of Judah's soldiers (2 Chronicles 25:5)

- c. So why did God command and permit these, but become displeased with David's census?
 - 1) Some scholars suggest maybe it's because David didn't collect the shekel from each soldier as required by the Law
 - 2) Other's suggest maybe it's because David's motives were impure
 - 3) Both of these are pure speculation, but there is another option that seems more probable and it comes right from the text
 - a) Look at v. 2; David commanded Joab to go through "**all the tribes of Israel**", but remember that the Law prohibited including the Levites in any military census
 - b) We then read in 1 Chronicles 21:6 that Joab refused to count the Levites and the Benjamites because "**the king's command was abhorrent**" to him
 - c) The implication here is that David's command included the counting of both of these tribes
 - d) Joab may have been repulsed by David's command to include the Levites because the Law demanded otherwise, and may have not wanted to include Benjamin because most of the Benjamite men had been nearly wiped out in Judges 17 and the tribe still recovering
 - e) So, when 1 Chronicles 21:7 states that the Lord was "displeased with this thing" it's likely referring to the fact that David included the Levites and Benjamites in the census which was a violation of the Law and showed a lack of compassion
 - 4) 1 Chronicles 27:23-24 also states that the Lord was angry because Joab started to count those who were under military age (but didn't finish)
 - 5) So, there were two problems with David's census which displeased the Lord:
 - a) David included the tribes of Levi and Benjamin, contrary to the Law
 - b) Joab counted those under 20 (military age), also contrary to the Law

4. Take Away: doing the right thing in the wrong way is sin

B. David's confession and the Lord's response (READ 10-14)

1. Upon Joab's return, David realizes the foolishness of his actions and confesses his sin to the Lord (10)
2. The Lord allows David to choose the consequences for his actions (11-13):
 - a. He gives him three options:
 - 1) Seven years of famine (NIV and 1 Chronicles 21:12 say "**three years**")
 - 2) Three months fleeing from before Israel's enemies
 - 3) Three days of pestilence
 - b. It's not stated why the Lord gave David a choice:
 - 1) Some have speculated it was a test for David, but this is speculation:
 - a) If he chose famine, it might have affected all of Israel but not him because of his own storehouses of food
 - b) If he chose the second option, it would have led to a large number of military casualties, but depending on when this took place David may have been safe because his military commanders demanded he no longer go out to battle (21:17)
 - c) The third option, it's argued, is the only one that truly would have affected David because pestilence would affect everyone, including David
 - d) By choosing the third option, it's argued, David revealed his selfless leadership
 - 2) A more probable explanation (in my opinion) is that the Lord made David choose the consequences as a means of accountability—He was the king and his sin caused consequences for all of Israel and what better way to remind David of this than to make him choose the consequences?
3. David chose door number 3, pestilence (14):
 - a. He referred to pestilence as "**falling into the hands of the Lord**"—1 Chronicles 21:12 describes it as "**the sword of the Lord, even pestilence in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.**"
 - b. David placed himself and all of Israel at the mercy of God believing He would be more merciful than Israel's enemies:
 - 1) Psalm 86:15: "**But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.**"
 - 2) Psalm 119:156: "**Great are Your mercies, O LORD; Revive me according to Your ordinances.**"
 - 3) Psalm 145:8: "**The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.**"
4. Take Away: sometimes, even confessed sin has consequences, and sometimes those consequences extend beyond us

C. The Lord's judgment and mercy (READ 15-17)

1. We see the Lord's judgment when He plagues Israel with pestilence for three days (15):
 - a. 70,000 "**men of the people from dan to Beersheba died**" (15):

- 1) The mention of “**men**” here suggests only men died
 - 2) This seems consistent with the Law because according to Exodus 30:11-16 the penalty for not following the rules for a military consensus would result in a plague among the men of military age
 - 3) It seems that since David may have attempted to inflate the number of military men by including the Levites and Benjamites in his count, the consequences reduced the number of available military men
 - 4) In a crude sense, the penalty fit the crime
- b. Was it right for the Lord to punish Israel for David’s sin?
- 1) Clearly, David identifies his sin as the cause of God’s judgment against Israel and he refers to Israel as innocent sheep (17)
 - 2) But, Israel wasn’t truly innocent itself because this entire episode started when God raised up an adversary against Israel because His “**anger burned against Israel**” for some unnamed sin (24:1)
 - 3) The Lord may have used David’s sin as the catalyst to bring judgement upon Israel
2. We also see the Lord’s mercy just as David had hoped (16-17):
- a. We learn in v. 16 that as the destroying angel approached Jerusalem God ordered Him to stop: “**It is enough! Now relax your hand!**”
 - b. It’s not clear why He spared Jerusalem, but He might have been moved by David’s plea in v. 17 (see also v. 25)
 - c. It’s also possible (though speculative) that the Lord spared Jerusalem because it was located in Benjamin, the only territory Joab refused to count (the Levites weren’t a territory):
 - 1) The Lord may have considered them guiltless for not having participated in the census
 - 2) He may have had compassion on them for the same reason Joab refused to count them—the small number of men due to being wiped out previously
 - d. Whatever the reason, we see the Lord exercise the very mercy which David was so sure he’d see in the Lord
3. Take Away: when it comes to God’s people, His judgment (e.g. chastisement) is not without mercy

D. David offers up sacrifices to atone for sin and thank the Lord (READ 18-25)
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1. After David pleads with the Lord to spare Israel, the Lord commands David through the prophet Gad to build an altar in Jerusalem (18)
2. The purpose for the altar was to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings so that the Lord would remove the plague (21):
 - a. Burnt offerings were to atone for sin
 - b. Peace offerings always followed the burnt offerings and they had many purposes in the OT, but one of which was as a praise or thanksgiving offering for the Lord’s deliverance
3. Following the offerings, “**the Lord was move by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel**” (25)

4. Of special importance here is David's refusal to accept the threshing floor from Araunah as a gift, and instead demanding that he pay for it because he would not make an offering that did not personally cost him something (24)
5. Take Away: the Lord desires restoration after we sin and still hears our prayers (1 John 1:9)

Conclusion

1. I've already suggested some take-aways or lessons we could learn from each of the points above
2. However, we'd be remiss if we didn't see another example here of how David serves as a type of Christ:
 - a. David as a type of Christ as priest
 - b. It's not a perfect example but they never are, but does point to some important aspects of Christ as our priest
 - c. David serves as a mediator between God and Israel just as Christ serves as an mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5): **"For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,"**
 - d. David makes atonement for Israel's sin, just as Jesus made atonement for our sin (1 John 2:2): **"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."**
 - e. David refused to make a sacrifice that cost him nothing, just as Jesus made sacrifice for us at great cost to Himself (Philippians 2:8): **"Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."**
 - f. David's sacrifice removed Israel's guilt and restored peace between them and God, while Jesus' sacrifice removed our guilt and made peace for us (Romans 5:1): **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"**