

DAVID: A MAN OF PASSION AND DESTINY

STUDY TWENTY-THREE

When the Godly Are Foolish

2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21

It would be wonderful if I could say that we are guaranteed immunity from sin as we grow older. We will never in this life be immune from sin's appeal . . . ever. Often those who fall the hardest are those who have walked with God the longest. There is no such thing as outgrowing sin.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ROLE models are like a lighthouse in a storm, providing guidance for those adrift in the dark seas of life. Yet when these beacons of light go dim—when a trusted family member, teacher, coach, or pastor fails—those who are stuck in the storm can feel more lost than ever.

These moments of failure inflict particularly painful damage when the one who falls is a *spiritual* role model. It may feel like such falling is seemingly impossible, but the sad reality is that *anyone can fall*. Sin's power and presence will remain in this life for everyone, and it can pull anyone into the darkness if allowed. Even those considered the godliest can fall if they aren't vigilant.

So how should a person live with this hard reality that even the godliest people will waver in their faith? This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores this question by examining one sinful decision King David made toward the end of his life.



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When the Godly Are Foolish

2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

David knew he wasn't immune to the temptation of the flesh, and in his moments of weakness, he turned to God for strength. Pray the words of *Psalm 141:1–4* as you prepare to engage with Scripture today.

O LORD, I am calling to you. Please hurry!
Listen when I cry to you for help!
Accept my prayer as incense offered to you,
and my upraised hands as an evening offering.
Take control of what I say, O LORD,
and guard my lips.
Don't let me drift toward evil
or take part in acts of wickedness.
Don't let me share in the delicacies
of those who do wrong.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

David's political life ended the same way it began—at war with the Philistines. The first step of his journey to the throne was his battle with Goliath, and as he reached the end of his life's road, he once again found himself entangled in battle with the Philistine giants (*1 Chronicles 20:4–8*).



Observation: David's Foolish Decision

As he planned the campaign against the enemy Philistines, David made the surprising decision to take a census of all the people of Israel. The record of David's census is preserved in both *2 Samuel 24* and *1 Chronicles 21*.

As you read these accounts, you will likely notice some differences. But they don't entail contradictions. Think of these parallel narratives as an instant replay—like you're viewing the same event from two angles. For now, focus on the theological theme and emphasis of each account.



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Rationalization of a Decision—2 Samuel 24:1–9 and 1 Chronicles 21:1–6

According to 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, who prompted David to take a census of Israel?

2 Samuel 24:1: _____

1 Chronicles 21:1: _____

These verses illustrate the complex outworking of God’s plan. Bible scholar, Thomas L. Constable, *explains* four causes in God’s decision to enact judgment against Israel. The final and ultimate cause was God. Satan and the Philistines were instrumental causes that incited David’s missteps, which was the immediate cause that kickstarted the unfolding of God’s decree.

According to 2 Samuel 24:3 and 1 Chronicles 21:3, 6, how did the commander Joab react to David’s desire to take the census?

Consequences of Disobedience—2 Samuel 24:10–17 and 1 Chronicles 21:7–17

Soon after the completion of the census, David realized what Joab already knew. The census was a mistake. After David confessed his sin, God offered David three choices for Israel’s punishment. According to 2 Samuel 24:12–13 and 1 Chronicles 21:10–12, what options did God give David?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



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According to *2 Samuel 24:14–15* and *1 Chronicles 21:13–14*, how did David respond to God? What did God do next?

In a delicate balance of justice and mercy, God personally stopped the carnage afflicting the Israelites. After David witnessed the consequences of his actions, what did he say in *2 Samuel 24:17* and *1 Chronicles 21:17*?

Altar of Deliverance—*2 Samuel 24:18–25* and *1 Chronicles 21:18–30*

According to *2 Samuel 24:18* and *1 Chronicles 21:18*, how did God respond to David's plea?



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David obeyed God by purchasing land along with animals for sacrifice because he would “not present burnt offerings to the LORD my God that have cost me nothing” (*2 Samuel 24:24*). According to *2 Samuel 24:25* and *1 Chronicles 21:26–27*, what happened when David offered his sacrifice to God?

Why did David take the census in the first place? First, he was out of touch with the Lord. You will not read of prayer, the seeking of God’s counsel, or the searching of God’s Word for this decision. Second, he was unaccountable to anyone around him. That is a dangerous spot to be in. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Owning Up to Mistakes

Kings and wars and censuses may feel distant. Yet these accounts provide more than mere historical data. Interpretation looks at passages of Scripture to determine timeless theological principles that will nourish the soul of any Christian.¹

When Joab asked why David wanted to take the census, David dodged the question. Why didn’t he answer his trusted friend? What was his hidden motive behind taking the census? Why did his actions enflame God’s wrath? See *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org to help you work through these questions.



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How did David's attitude develop throughout the narrative? What does his example teach about taking responsibility for personal sins and mistakes?

What does this account reveal about God's character?

Throughout David's life, he made mistakes, but God's mercy never ran dry. God's mercy still abounds today, and He freely offers forgiveness to those who seek it. This truth is central to the apostle Paul's discussion of the good news of Jesus Christ in his letter to the Romans.



Correlation: God's Merciful Response

God's forgiveness in this passage offers an opportunity to explore a deep theological question. How could God pardon David's sin and the sins of Israel without compromising His own holiness? Or better yet, how can God pardon *any* sin and remain just? The apostle Paul tackles this question head-on in [Romans 3:21–26](#).



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Satan's attacks assault more than just spiritual leaders and prominent people. According to *Romans 3:23*, who is guilty before God? Based on that same verse, what is the ultimate reason for this guilt?

According to *3:22, 24–25*, how does God justify (or declare righteous) guilty sinners? How does this model for salvation prove God to be just, according to *3:26*?

How did David's act on the altar at Araunah's threshing floor foreshadow the act of Jesus Christ on the cross? Why was God able to forgive sins before Jesus' crucifixion actually took place?

What a powerful picture of God's grace! It is indeed good news that He offers guilty sinners forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. So what should the forgiven do to overcome sin?



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Application: Keeping the Godly from Foolishness

Based on David's example, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers advice to the godly who seek to avoid making foolish decisions.

First, *find accountability*. David had Joab, but when David misstepped, Joab just watched his friend stray off the path of righteousness rather than guide him back toward the right way. Do you have a network of people who will hold you accountable for your actions—friends who are willing to confront you with courage when you're in the wrong?

Second, *remember sin's consequences*. David built an altar to regularly remind himself of his foolish decision, the frightening consequences, his faith-filled repentance, and God's full forgiveness. What would it look like for you to set up a similar "altar"? How can you tangibly remind yourself of a time when you experienced both sin's consequences and God's mercy?



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Third, *take God seriously*. God is holy and righteous and just. This means that sin is wholly incompatible with His nature. Do you view sin as God views it? Does it fill you with alarm? Do you recognize its devastating cost? How can adjusting your perspective of God's character aid you the next time you hear temptation's strong and alluring call?

Sadly, even the godliest of people make foolish decisions and fall off course. But God is merciful, and He lovingly guides His children back on the right path. Learn from David, and in faith, continue running the race God has prepared for you—even if you lose your step.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for showing me mercy in those times I made foolish decisions. Help me look back at these times with a sober mind to remember both the cost of sin and the bounty of Your mercy. Give me the strength to lead a life that glorifies You. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

