



A House Set in Order (Part 2): David's Legacy (2 Sam 23-24)

Notes: Week Twelve

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.
This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between
the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

New American Commentary¹

4. David Utters His Last Oracle

David's prophetic oracle presents the ideal of a righteous king guided by the fear of the Lord. Such a king brings life and blessing to his nation but judgment and death to all who would threaten it. At the same time the oracle affirms that David's dynasty alone is certified by the Lord to be Israel's righteous kings.

The *Targum of Jonathan* interpreted this section as a prophecy of the coming Messiah. Jesus also seems to have understood this passage as messianic; his comparison of himself to "light" ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#); cf. v. [4](#)) and his prophetic parable comparing the wicked to weeds to be burned ([Matt 13:30](#), [40](#); cf. v. [7](#)) suggests that he was drawing upon images derived from this passage.

[23:1-2](#) Though called "the last words of David" (v. [1](#)), this "oracle" (Hb., *nē'um*) is not the last of the words attributed to David in 2 Samuel (cf. [23:15](#); [24:2](#), [10](#), [14](#), [17](#), [21](#), [24](#)). This rather obvious fact reminds us that the writer was more than an editor concerned only with chronological details. He was in fact a true author, deliberately arranging and shaping the materials at his disposal to convey the intended themes as effectively as possible.

The present section is clearly one of the highlighted passages in 2 Samuel, being given prominence in at least three ways. First, it—along with [22:1-51](#)—was placed at the core of the aside's chiasmic structure: it thus functioned as part of the thematic centerpiece of this portion of 1, 2 Samuel. Second, it was designated an "oracle," a special speech-act category reserved for prophetic utterances of unusual significance. Finally, it was memorialized as the final utterance of "the man exalted by the Most High" who became Israel's greatest king.

In the introductory verse David is designated in several different ways. First, he is contextualized according to his genealogy: he was the "son of Jesse." This first credential would seem to be an insignificant one, since Jesse himself played no recorded role in Israel's history. However, it did mark David as a true Israelite—and in fact a Judahite—and thus as one who fulfilled the requirements established in the Torah for proper kingship (cf. [Gen 49:10](#); [Deut 17:15](#)).

Whatever limitations may have been imposed on David by his background were overcome by the next two realities: David also was "the man exalted by the Most High" and "the man anointed by the God of Jacob." This divine intervention in the life of Jesse's son meant first of all that David fulfilled the other

1. Robert D. Bergen, *New American Commentary – Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 463-.

remaining Torah qualification for kingship, since only one who had been chosen by the Lord could serve in this capacity (cf. [Deut 17:15](#)). Additionally, David's selection by the God who was above all meant that he could be lifted above any human limitation. David's anointing by the God of Jacob implicitly connected David's career with Jacob's—Jacob was used of God to found a nation; David, to found the royal family that ruled Jacob's nation.

Finally, David was defined by the opinions of others: he was “the beloved of Israel's songs” (NIV, “Israel's singer of songs”): David was an admired hero, memorialized in popular Israelite songs mostly lost to us today (but cf. [1 Sam 18:7](#); [21:11](#); [Pss 78:70–72](#); [89:3–37](#)).

But in addition to all these other appellations, David was a prophet (cf. [Acts 2:30](#)). Thus David has now been portrayed throughout the books of Samuel as king, priest, and prophet. In these roles David foreshadows the work of his greatest descendant, Jesus Christ. Throughout the New Testament Jesus is likewise depicted as a king ([John 18:37](#); [19:21](#)), priest ([Heb 3:1](#); [4:14–5:10](#); [7:21–8:6](#)), and prophet ([Luke 1:76](#); [4:24](#); [13:33](#); [24:19](#); [Acts 3:22](#)). Since David, the first member of Israel's royal messianic line, functioned in these three roles, it seems appropriate that Jesus the Messiah should not only be depicted by the New Testament writers as inheriting these roles but superseding David's accomplishments in them. He did not choose this role but accepted it when “the Spirit of the LORD spoke through” (v. [2](#)) him. David's role was essentially passive in this event. When he spoke, it was the Lord's “word”—not his own—that was on his “tongue” (cf. [2 Pet 1:21](#)). As in the case of at least one other Old Testament prophet (cf. [1 Kgs 13:21–22](#)), David's status as a prophet did not prevent him from receiving prophetic messages from other prophets (cf. [1 Sam 22:5](#); [2 Sam 7:5–17](#); [12:11–14](#); [24:12–13](#), [18](#)).

[23:3–4](#) In these verses the Lord reveals the two primary demands of the ideal king and then characterizes the reign of a king who meets these ideals. First of all, the king who pleases the Lord must rule over men “in righteousness” (v. [3](#)): one who exercises authority over others must use that authority in a manner consistent with the Lord's teachings. Second, a proper king must rule “in the fear of God.” Only one who is under God's authority is fit to be an authority over others.

A king who fulfills these two fundamental requirements is a great blessing to his subjects. “He is like the light of the morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning” (v. [4](#)). The comparison suggests that a ruler who rules according to the Lord's guidelines ushers in a new period of opportunity, growth, and blessing for his people.

Furthermore, a righteous king is “like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.” For well-watered seedlings to fulfill their potential, they must have bright sunlight; similarly, strong, righteous leaders help create an environment in which the people under their care can fulfill their potential.

[23:5](#) God's blessing on David was evident: the blessings indicated that his “house” was “with God” (NIV, “right with God”). Though other families also had known the blessing of being with God, David's was given something from the Lord others did not receive, for with David the Lord had “made ... an everlasting covenant” of kingship (cf. [7:11–16](#)), “arranged and secured in every part.” Because of the trustworthy word of the Lord, David was confident that he who had begun a good work would carry it to completion (cf. [Phil 1:6](#)). The Lord would “bring to fruition” David's salvation and grant him his “every desire.”

David's use of the term “salvation” probably was primarily in the material sense, that is, with reference to victory over enemies and hostile circumstances; however, a spiritual dimension cannot be discounted (cf. [Ps 27](#)). To the extent that David's heart was attuned to God's will, David could expect God to grant

him his “every desire” (cf. [7:2–16](#)). As P. E. Satterthwaite notes, this verse portrays “David as he should always have been, not as he always was” (cf. David’s sinful desire toward Bathsheba; [11:4](#)).

[23:6–7](#) Even as the Lord could be counted on to bring blessing to the house of David, so David could be counted on to bring the blessing of justice to his land. As a righteous king David would see to it that “evil men” would be “cast aside like thorns” (v. [6](#)).

In a brilliant oracle-ending analogy, David likened the fate of the evil in his realm to the fate of weeds in a farmer’s field: both would be killed with “a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear” (v. [7](#)) and be “burned up where they lie.” The king’s righteous zeal would purge evil from his realm, through the use of deadly force where necessary.

5. Loyal and Heroic Soldiers of David—II

David’s unparalleled success was the result not only of his relationship with the Lord, but also of his valiant soldiers’ efforts. In this rather extended section some thirty-six individuals are singled out by name for their brave deeds and/ or positions in David’s administration. The list appears to be cumulative, since it includes the names of at least two individuals who died during different but relatively early periods in David’s administration. Alternatively, it may have come from “a time relatively early in his reign over all Israel.”

[23:8–12](#) First in the list of “David’s mighty men” was “Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite” (v. [8](#)), who was made “chief of the Three.” This position was not mentioned elsewhere in 1, 2 Samuel but obviously was prestigious—undoubtedly Josheb-Basshebeth reported directly to David. He earned this position with the amazing battlefield feat of raising “his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.” Josheb-Basshebeth also may have been known as “Adino the Eznite” and as Jashobeam (cf. [1 Chr 11:11](#)).

The second most-honored individual in his administration was “Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite” (v. [9](#)). This individual had accompanied “David when they taunted the Philistines gathered ... for battle,” apparently at Pas Dammim/Ephes Dammim (cf. [1 Chr 11:13](#); [1 Sam 17:1](#)). In a remarkable show of courage and strength, Eleazar “stood his ground and struck down the Philistines” (v. [10](#)), even though the remainder of David’s forces retreated from the Philistines during the battle. Eleazar was so intense and unrelenting in his attack that he ceased only when “his hand grew tired and froze to the sword,” that is, after muscle cramps temporarily disabled him. The writer attributed Eleazar’s extraordinary efforts ultimately to the Lord, who “brought about a great victory that day.” Through this one soldier the Philistines were vanquished; all that remained for the other soldiers was “to strip the dead” (cf. [1 Sam 31:8](#)), a practice that provided booty for the victorious soldiers—perhaps in lieu of other payment.

The writer’s acknowledgment of a union between human skill and divine enablement affirms and extends the theology of war present in the previous chapter (cf. [22:35](#), [38](#)). Yahweh the Warrior trained, strengthened, and gave victory on the battlefield to his anointed David, but he did not limit this treatment to David. Other soldiers of the covenant, such as Eleazar, could also experience this divine blessing.

The third member of the Three was “Shammah son of Agee the Hararite” (v. [11](#)). Like Eleazar, he distinguished himself through a courageous one-man stand against the Philistines, putting his life at risk to defend the Promised Land.

Shammah's willingness to die for the sake of the land may properly be understood as a defense of the Israelite faith. According to the Torah, the Lord owned the Promised Land (cf. [Lev 25:23](#); [Deut 32:43](#)) and Israelites were its tenants and caretakers; thus to defend the land was to take a stand in behalf of the Lord. Through his valor Shammah was expressing a deep level of faith in Torah promises regarding Israel's right to the land (cf. [Gen 12:7](#); [13:15](#); [17:8](#); [26:3](#); [28:13](#); [Exod 33:1](#); [Num 32:11](#); [Deut 1:8](#); [6:10](#); [30:20](#)).

The Lord honored Shammah's faith, with the result that Shammah "struck the Philistines down." Though Shammah's sword slew the enemy, in actuality it was the Lord who "brought about a great victory."

23:13–17 During one of David's more difficult encounters with the Philistines—perhaps one from his premonarchical period (cf. [1 Sam 22:1](#)) or, possibly, in the early stages of his reign in Jerusalem (cf. [5:17](#))—David and a few men were confined to "the cave of Adullam" (v. [13](#)). Their escape was blocked by "a band of Philistines ... encamped in the Valley of Rephaim." In a move apparently designed to taunt David and motivate him to venture forth from "the stronghold" (v. [13](#)), the Philistines stationed an occupying force "at Bethlehem," David's hometown.

Being trapped in the cave that had no natural water supply, David became thirsty. He openly expressed a desire, perhaps nothing more than a wish—certainly not a command—for someone to fetch him "a drink of water from the cistern near the gate of Bethlehem" (v. [15](#)), more than twelve miles away.

Living up to their reputation for fearless faith—or arrogant courage—"the three mighty men" (v. [16](#)) left David in the care of "three of the thirty chief men" (v. [13](#)) and set out to fulfill their leader's wishes. Somehow they "broke through the Philistine lines," entered the occupied city of Bethlehem, "drew water from the well near the gate," and safely "carried it back to David"—a journey of at least twenty-five miles.

David was overwhelmed by the act of devotion and bravery performed by these three men. Knowing what was involved in their acquisition of the liquid, David did something that initially appears to be absurd or insulting: he "refused to drink it." The gift of water acquired at such great peril represented something so precious that David considered himself unworthy to drink it. In fact, because of "the risk" (v. [17](#)) that the Three took, the Bethlehem waters symbolized "the blood of men who" had literally faced death. Accordingly, David "poured it out before the LORD," giving it there in the cave as an offering to the Lord. This act finds a rough parallel in the unnamed woman's extravagant decanting of perfume on Jesus' body (cf. [Mark 14:3–9](#) and parallels).

23:18–19 An individual who was "held in greater honor than the Three" (v. [19](#)) was "Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruiah" (v. [18](#)), David's nephew. Abishai's prestige was based on his heroic exploits on the battlefield. His most outstanding accomplishment was against an unnamed enemy, when he "raised his spear against three hundred men," all of "whom he killed." Elsewhere in Scripture he is credited with numerous other daring and brilliant military activities: he accompanied David on a stealthy foray into Saul's camp (cf. [1 Sam 26:6–12](#)), commanded most of David's forces on an Ammonite campaign (cf. [10:10](#)), led one-third of David's troops against Absalom's rebels (cf. [18:2](#)), was given command of David's troops in quelling Sheba's revolt (cf. [20:6](#)), and killed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt (cf. [1 Chr 18:12](#)). For these reasons he was appointed "commander" (v. [19](#)) of the Three, "even though he was not included among them."

[23:20–23](#) A man of similar military aptitude was “Benaiah son of Jehoiada” (v. [20](#)), the son of a levitical priest (cf. [1 Chr 27:5](#)) from the southern Judahite city of “Kabzeel” (cf. [Josh 15:21](#)). A unique display of courage on his part—one to which David could somewhat relate (cf. [1 Sam 17:34–36](#))—involved going “down into a cistern [NIV, “pit”] on a snowy day” and killing “a lion”; apparently this wild animal had accidentally fallen into an underground tank used for collecting and storing drinking water.

Benaiah’s encounters with Israel’s enemies included confronting and killing “two of Moab’s best men” and striking “down a huge Egyptian” (v. [21](#)). The contest with the Egyptian was particularly memorable, since Benaiah was armed with only “a club” while his massive opponent possessed “a spear in his hand.” Since no canonical accounts describe an encounter between Israel and Egypt during David’s administration, it is possible the Egyptian was a mercenary soldier fighting with another of Israel’s enemies.

Though Benaiah “was not included among the Thirty” (v. [23](#)), he was “as famous as” they were and “held in greater honor than any of the Thirty.” No doubt because of Benaiah’s skill and bravery, but perhaps also because of his priestly devotion to the Lord, David “put him in charge of his bodyguard”—the Kerethites and Pelethites (cf. [8:18](#)). David’s decision to use a Levite as leader of those most directly responsible for his personal safety is a measure of the degree of cooperation that existed between the king and the priesthood at that time (contrast with Saul, [1 Sam 22:9–19](#)).

[23:24–39](#) At least thirty-one individuals are mentioned in the section that lists “the Thirty” (v. [24](#))—the actual count depends on how one treats issues present in vv. [32–33](#). The list begins and ends with individuals known to have died on the battlefield—“Asahel the brother of Joab” (cf. [2:23](#)) and “Uriah the Hittite” (v. [39](#); cf. [11:17](#)). This suggests that the persons actually designated as the Thirty at any given time varied throughout David’s administration.

Asahel’s presence on the list, even though he died before David became king of all Israel, indicates that David had organized this special squadron very early in his public career, perhaps even while a fugitive from Saul in the desert.

A study of the cities of origin for these individuals suggests that the majority of the Thirty—perhaps all but twelve—were Judahites. This is not surprising, considering David’s own tribal affiliation and the tensions that existed between Judah and the other tribes. Of the non-Judahite Israelites among the Thirty, at least three came from the tribe of Benjamin—“Abiezer from Anathoth” (v. [27](#)), “Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin” (v. [29](#)), and “Naharai the Beerothite” (v. [37](#)). Two others may have come from Manasseh—“Shammah the Harodite” and “Elika the Harodite” (v. [25](#)), and another two from Ephraim—“Benaiah the Pirathonite” and “Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash” (v. [30](#)). “Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maacathite” (v. [34](#)) may have come from the tribal territory of Dan (cf. [20:14](#)). “The son of the Gadite” (v. [36](#); NIV, “the son of Hagri”) may have come from the tribe of Gad.

Three of the non-Judahites—“Igal son of Nathan from Zobah” (v. [36](#)), “Zelek the Ammonite” (v. [37](#)), and “Uriah the Hittite” (v. [39](#)) apparently were foreigners. If “Eliphelet son of Ahasbai” (v. [34](#)) was not a Danite, then he must have come from the city-state of Maacah. If David founded the Thirty during his fugitive period, then it is possible that some of these individuals—perhaps the foreigners—were runaway slaves or debtors (cf. [1 Sam 22:2](#)).

The issue of the ethnic and tribal composition of the Thirty is made more complex by the fact that at least three of the cities—Barhum (v. [31](#)), Shaalbon (v. [32](#)), and Harar (vv. [33–34](#))—are not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament. Complicating the picture still further is the fact that more than one “Carmel” (v. [35](#)) is mentioned in the Bible, one within Judah (cf. [Josh 15:55](#)) and the other in Manasseh (cf. [1 Kgs 18:19](#))—and, as mentioned earlier, more than one Maacah (cf. [10:8](#); [20:14](#)).

What is the practical value of having this list in Scripture? It demonstrates David's willingness to reward those under his command when they performed their tasks with excellence. Thus it reflects David's great skill in relationships and suggests a model to be emulated by godly leaders of all generations.

6. David Stops a Divinely Sent Plague

This chapter serves as the counterpart to [21:1–14](#) within the chiasmic structure of the Samuel aside. In both sections David is portrayed as the person responsible for halting disasters brought about by the foolish actions of Israelite kings. In both cases it is David's pursuit of the Lord's will—David acting as the man after the Lord's heart—that saves the nation. By this the author demonstrates the necessity of having leaders obedient and sensitive to the Lord.

This concluding chapter also serves as a fitting climax to 1, 2 Samuel, for it simultaneously links David with the best of Israel's past and the glory of their future. By sacrificing burnt offerings provided for him in the very area where Abraham had once done the same (cf. [Gen 22:13](#); cf. [1 Chr 3:1](#)), David's life and ministry become identified with the greatest of the Torah patriarchs. By acting as an intercessor to bring a divinely sent plague to a halt, as Aaron once did ([Num 16:47–49](#)), he assumes the status of a priest and thus foreshadows the priestly actions of Jesus, the ultimate Davidic priest. By acquiring the site of the Lord's temple for Israel, David also lays the groundwork for the most celebrated material aspect of Israelite religion.

[24:1–4](#) “Again” (v. [1](#)), that is, sometime after the events of [21:1–14](#), “the anger of the Lord burned against Israel.” The reason for the Lord's wrath is not stated, but as on previous occasions, it must have stemmed from Israel's violation of some aspect of the Torah.

In order to bring judgment against Israel, the Lord “incited David” to “take a census of Israel and Judah.” The writer's attribution of the action to the Lord is not contradictory to [1 Chr 21:1](#); it reflects his understanding that Yahweh is Lord of the universe, exercising dominion over all powers and authorities, whether in heaven or on earth (cf. [Ps 97:9](#); [Eph 1:20](#)). From this position of utmost strength the Lord apportions power to lesser beings to be used in enforcing the moral aspects of the created order. The Bible teaches that God empowers even destructive beings—whether superhuman (cf. [1 Kgs 22:19–23](#); [2 Thess 2:11](#)) or human (cf. [Judg 1:14](#); [Hab 1:6](#); [Acts 4:28](#))—in limited ways to bring judgment and, ultimately, redemption. In the present case the Lord used both superhuman and human beings to enforce the moral order, enabling Satan to entice David to act foolishly so as to bring judgment on Israel.

The fact that the Lord oversees the entire judgment process is ultimately a comfort to humanity. It means that no malevolent action can occur that is not subject to God's oversight and divinely imposed limitations. It also means that nothing can occur in the universe that God cannot ultimately use for good (cf. [Gen 50:20](#); [Acts 2:36](#); [Rom 8:28](#)).

David obeyed the judgment-inciting command and ordered “Joab and the army commanders with him” (v. [2](#)) to “go throughout all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba” and take a military census. The Torah permitted such censuses but warned that a plague would result if they were not conducted properly (cf. [Exod 30:12](#)). Since the Lord explicitly permitted censuses to be taken and even ordered their undertaking in the Torah (cf. [Num 1:2](#); [4:2](#), [22](#); [26:2](#)), David's sin does not seem to lie in the mere fact that he conducted one.

What then created the problem in this census? It was either David's motivation for the census or the manner in which it was carried out. Perhaps it was undertaken for purposes of self-aggrandizement — David may have wanted to “know how many” Israelite males above the age of twenty there were in Israel in order to be able to boast more accurately. Alternatively, it may be that David did not require all enrolled males to pay the half-shekel ransom required by the Torah (cf. [Exod 30:13–16](#)), an oversight

guaranteed to bring a plague against Israel. Speaking in favor of this second option is the fact that on a previous occasion, David had failed to enforce Torah regulations for an otherwise permissible action—transporting the ark of the covenant—with disastrous actions (cf. [6:7](#)).

“Joab” (v. [3](#)) was clearly troubled by the king’s order and openly questioned it when it came. While expressing the wish that the Lord might “multiply the troops a hundred times over” during David’s lifetime, Joab was convinced— perhaps based on the Torah warning ([Exod 30:12](#))—that ascertaining the number of Israelite soldiers would automatically endanger them.

In spite of Joab’s public misgivings about the project, “the king’s word ... overruled Joab and the army commanders” (v. [4](#)). Thus David’s leading officers set about the daunting task “to enroll the fighting men of Israel.”

[24:5–8](#) The census takers made a lengthy counterclockwise loop through all Israelite-controlled territories on both sides of the Jordan River to complete their assignment. The men departed from Jerusalem and went eastward, “crossing the Jordan” (v. [5](#)). They then proceeded to the southern extremity of Israelite possessions east of the Jordan, camping some fourteen miles east of the Dead Sea “near Aroer” (modern ‘Ara`ir). After gathering their data in that region, “they went” northward through territories allotted to “Gad and on to Jazer,” at the border of Ammon. Continuing their northward trek, “they went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi” (v. [6](#)), apparently the territory northeast of the Sea of Galilee. From there they went twenty-five or more miles north of the Sea of Galilee “on to Dan Jaan” and then curved westward “toward Sidon” at the northern extreme of Israelite territory. From there they headed southwest to the Mediterranean coast, going “toward the fortress of Tyre” (v. [7](#)). In this region allotted to Asher there were many unconquered towns (cf. [Judg 1:31–32](#)) still inhabited by “the Hivites and Canaanites.”

Joab and the officers then made their way through the heartlands of the Promised Land moving southward “on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah,” the largest city in the southern regions of Israel. Finally, the census-takers closed the geographical loop by going some forty miles northward “back to Jerusalem” (v. [8](#)).

The information-gathering phase of the census had taken “nine months and twenty days,” or 285 days. Since it involved Israel’s top military officers, it was likely initiated toward the end of a military campaign season and concluded in the spring, “the time when kings go off to war” ([11:1](#)).

[24:9–10](#) In contrast to the census totals of the Torah (cf. [Num 2:32](#); [26:51](#)), the numbers given here appear to have been rounded. Perhaps Joab deliberately presented inexact figures to David in hopes of averting a divine judgment against the king and nation. Alternatively, the accurate numbers may have been lost from history (cf. [1 Chr 27:24](#)), with the result that the figures recorded here are approximations handed down to the writer through oral tradition. The census figures in the parallel account of [1 Chr 21:5](#) are higher—1.1 million for Israel and 470,000 for Judah, a fact that can perhaps be accounted for by understanding the Chronicler’s largest figure as including individuals of Judah and the rest of Israel; other differences in the numbers may be related in part to the apparent tendency of 1, 2 Samuel’s author to round numbers.

Apart from the tensions that exist between the census figures in Samuel and those in Chronicles, modern biblical commentators almost universally reject the validity of the numbers on the grounds that they are too large. The usual means of adjusting the number downward is to interpret the Hebrew term *’elep*, normally rendered “thousand,” as a clan-based “military unit” of uncertain number—thus Israel had a total of thirteen hundred military units. While intellectually appealing to minds influenced by modern Western cultural thought, this explanation is unsatisfying since it requires the reader to conclude that

Israel's population had shrunk significantly since the days of Moses, when the clearly literal census figure for Israelite fighters was 603,550 (cf. [Exod 38:26](#); [Num 2:32](#)).

After David received the reckoning, his "heart struck him" (v. [10](#); NIV, "was conscience-stricken"). He recognized that the census as he conducted it was in violation of the Lord's will. Wisely, David took responsibility for his transgression and confessed that he had "sinned greatly in what" he had done (cf. [Ps 32:1–5](#)). Employing a verb that can denote morally deficient activity (Hb., *sākal*; cf. [1 Sam 13:13](#)), he admitted that in taking the census he had "done a very foolish thing."

24:11–14 The Lord, the Judge of all the earth and Chief Enforcer of Torah judgments (cf. [Exod 30:12](#)), heard David's confession and responded "before David got up the next morning" (v. [11](#)). Though David was himself a prophet (cf. [Matt 22:43](#); [Mark 12:36](#); [Acts 1:16](#); [2:30](#); [4:25](#); [Heb 4:7](#)), the Lord chose not to reveal his word directly to David. Instead, "the word of the Lord" came "to Gad the prophet, David's seer."

The Lord ordered Gad, David's trusted prophetic advisor since the preregnal days (cf. [1 Sam 22:5](#)), to inform the king that the Lord was giving him "three options" (v. [12](#)) for divine judgment. Each of the three alternatives carried the threat of great disruption and death for Israel, though the length and means of judgment varied considerably. God could use the forces of weather to bring "seven [NIV, "three"] years of famine" (v. [13](#))—he had used a similar form of judgment to punish Saul's sin (cf. [21:1](#)). Alternatively, the Lord could use human instrumentality to bring about "three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you." Finally, the Lord could act apart from famine and sword to bring a third apocalyptic horseman, "three days of plague" (v. [13](#)).

Hearing the gruesome alternatives, David "was in deep distress" (v. [15](#)). Yet he chose to fall back on a timeless principle: trust God to do the right thing (cf. [Gen 18:25](#)). He knew from experience that the Lord would be more merciful than any of his enemies, and the king preferred the wounds of a friend (cf. [Ps 141:5](#); [Prov 27:6](#))—especially a divine one—to those of an enemy. David knew from both the Torah (cf. [Exod 34:6](#)) and personal experience that the Lord's "mercies are numerous" (NIV, "mercy is great"). After all, he had deserved to die for sins committed against Uriah and Bathsheba; yet the Lord had mercifully commuted his death sentence. Thus David chose a form of punishment that did not require a human intermediary, one that was incidentally the shortest.

24:15–17 Beginning that very morning, "the Lord sent a plague on Israel" (v. [15](#)). Unrelentingly for a period of three days—"until the end of the time designated"—the Lord's divine surrogate, "the angel of the Lord" (v. [16](#)), inflicted the plague on Israel's citizens. In the process "seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died."

Even more destruction would doubtless have occurred were it not for the Lord's mercy; for "when the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem," the Lord ordered him to "withdraw" it. Once again David is seen to have understood the Lord correctly: so real was the Lord's mercy that he was unwilling to pursue the killing further and "was grieved because of the calamity." Perhaps the Lord's mercy had been aroused by David's courageous faith. The king reminded the Lord that it was David himself who had sinned. Therefore, it was most fitting that the Lord's "hand fall upon" David and his family, not on the "sheep"—that is, Israel's citizens.

24:18–23 On that climactic concluding day of the plague, David received instructions from the Lord through the prophet Gad to build an altar on the site where the plague had stopped. The Lord had once ordered Jacob, the founder of the nation of Israel, to build an altar ([Gen 35:1](#)); now God ordered David, the founder of the nation of Israel's worship center at Jerusalem, to do the same. The threshing floor, apparently situated at the crest of the plateau on which Jerusalem was resting, would later become the site of the Lord's temple (cf. [1 Chr 22:1](#)).

Obediently, David did “just as the Lord had commanded” (v. [19](#)). The phrase “as the Lord had commanded” is employed fifty-three times in the Torah but only once in all of the Former Prophets. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the majority of the Torah occurrences relate to the establishment of Israelite religion, especially the construction and erection of the tabernacle. The employment of the phrase here thus links David’s action with the formation of Israelite worship and suggests an extension of that tradition. This connection is made explicit in [1 Chr 21:29–22:1](#).

No doubt one reason David came to Araunah—and not vice versa—was that Araunah was prohibited from entering the king’s palace (cf. discussion at [5:8](#)), but that did not explain to Araunah why a meeting of the two of them was necessary at all.

David resolved the issue by explaining his intention to purchase Araunah’s property for worship. Perhaps Araunah knew that a previous divine judgment against Israel ended with the killing of seven people (cf. [21:6–9](#)). If so, he probably was quite content to give “the king whatever pleases him” (v. [22](#)), including the land, the animals, and even the wood for the fire—as long as he did not have to give up his own life or the lives of any family members. Along with the material aspects, Araunah also offered the king the prayerful wish that “the Lord your God” might “accept you” (v. [23](#)).

[24:24–25](#) Although Araunah’s offer probably was sincere, David knew that compensation for land, animals, and goods was a moral necessity in human society (cf. [Gen 23:7–16](#)). Thus, he insisted on paying Araunah a fair price for his possessions. Furthermore, David understood the religious imperative of true sacrifice. For him, religion that cost nothing was worth nothing, either to God or humanity. The price David paid for the field was the established value of a large field dedicated to the Lord for one Jubilee cycle (cf. [Lev 27:16](#)).

Whether David actually made the offerings himself or had Aaronic priests carry out the task is not clear—presumably it was Aaronic priests (cf. [2 Chr 26:16–21](#)). However, since the king assumed responsibility for the expenses and oversaw the activities, he was credited with them.

In purchasing the land from Araunah and then utilizing it for sacrifice to the Lord, David was apparently following Torah guidelines regarding the dedication of land to the Lord (cf. [Lev 27:20–21](#)). When he did this, the land became permanently holy and was set aside in perpetuity for priestly use, a situation completely consistent with the site’s subsequent use for the temple of the Lord.

Because of David’s decisive and costly actions, “the Lord answered prayer in behalf of the land and the plague on Israel was stopped.” In making these sacrifices for his people, David foreshadowed the actions of Jesus, the ultimate son of David, who also gave sacrificially on a hill near Jerusalem for his people so that an even more tragic plague might be stopped. David’s climactic sacrifice involved the use of wood and blood on a hill outside the city; so did Jesus’ sacrifice. David’s sacrifice stopped a physical plague that had taken the lives of many Israelites; by Jesus’ wounds the new Israel likewise has “been healed” ([1 Pet 2:24](#)) because “he himself bore our sins in his body” ([1 Pet 2:24](#)).