

The LORD and the “gods” of the Nations, 4  
*Bitter Fruit*  
By Bob Vincent

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**Bible Text:** 2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21  
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*Now, Lord, would you help me, your sinful and inadequate servant who has no ability in himself to bless the people of God by proclaiming the word of God unless you by the Holy Spirit bless that word to our hearing and our receiving it. Meet with us, Lord, we pray. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

**Because of Adam's sin, the world in which we now live is not identical to the good and beautiful world God created. Instead, the devil is now called “the god of this world (αἰών, aion, age, structure, world order)” (2 Corinthians 4:4).**

I want you to reflect with me for a moment where we were last week. Last week, we were in Romans 5 which I just read a moment ago. Romans 5 teaches us a number of things, it teaches us that all of the trouble in this world is due to the sin of one individual, not two, and we understand from Scripture that Eve was deceived by Satan and she did what she did in ignorance, but the great sin was committed by her husband Adam.

He knew what he was doing, and we might even say *with malice aforethought*, that he deliberately disobeyed God out of loyalty to his wife. Wow, and the result of Adam's sin is that death entered into God's beautiful, perfect world because the world you and I live in is not the same as the world God created. The world that God created was a perfect world. There was no death here. There was no disease. There was no weakness. There was no aging. People would only mature as they would grow.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, I think sometimes, to know what I know now in my 70s and to feel the way I felt when I was about 18, and with martial arts and all that other stuff and being in really great shape, learning how to fly

through the air and land on my back without even hurting myself as I took those courses. Wow, I was a healthy guy.

Now I can tell you, aches and pains. It's part of life. What? Death is part of life. Why is it so, says Romans 5? It's so because of the sin of one man, his disobedience. He was warned clearly, "Dying you will die," the most emphatic way to word it in the Hebrew grammar, "Dying you will die," and he deliberately disobeyed God, wanting to be as God. And as he reached up, it was as if he were taking his fist and shaking it in the very face of God, and as a result of Adam's sin, the entire world was plunged into misery.

Here we are on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of March 2020, a day that our President has declared to be a National Day of Prayer. Wow, a National Day of Prayer. Why? Well, we'll see in a moment why that's so, but what I want us to understand as we think about the LORD and the gods of the nations is what happens is that the world comes to be administered by evil spirits.

Satan is called by Paul, "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Wow. How did that happen? Does it mean that Satan is sovereign over the world? No and yes, and we'll see how no and yes are true in just a moment.

No, Satan is not sovereign. God has ordained whatever comes to pass for his glory and your good, but God operates in an orderly way through means, and what I mean by that is this:

There are things God cannot do. God cannot murder. God kills people every day, but God has never murdered anyone. Murder is the unjust taking of a human life.

The Bible says that God does not lie. God cannot lie. And do you know what?

God cannot be tempted with evil nor does he tempt anyone (James 1:13). So, wait a minute, hold on.

If you look at the 10 Commandments, the 10 Commandments are not arbitrary things like God's sitting there and thinking, "Hm, let's see, let me make stealing wrong but not adultery." That's not the case.

Every single one of the 10 Commandments is a refraction of the very character of God. A prism breaks the light apart and shows what it's made out of. If we had a prism here this morning, we could have a big rainbow because a prism breaks up the light and shows you all of the colors from the beginning of infrared, that is, right after infrared to ultraviolet which you can't see those two, and so what I'm wanting to say is this: That the 10

Commandments are simply a refraction of the character of God, and that's why it is wrong to break the 10 Commandments because breaking them violates God's own character, and God's character never changes, and in God's character, God must obey – hold on here, Bob – God must obey his own word. That sounds really odd, but what I mean is this:

If God has given a promise that is an unconditional promise, God cannot break his promises. Let's hold onto that. God cannot break his promises, and the beautiful thing is as many as may be the promises of God, 2 Corinthians 1:20, in Jesus Christ they are yea and in him amen. We have wonderful access.

So we are dealing with a universe, a cosmos, that was created by God but has been radically marred and gnarled because of human sin and because of that, Satan has a claim on the planet, even though he was there in the garden of Eden and tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God, but he's become the god of this world.

**When we compare the account in Samuel with that in Chronicles, we discover many truths.**

Now let's follow that thought up today with 2 Samuel 24 and verse 1, page 514, and we're going to do some flipping back and forth between two passages today so you may want to keep your finger in both passages. 2 Samuel 24:1, page 514 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, page 657. So, those are both the passages, and we're going to look at the very first verse of both of these chapters because they are describing the same event.

**The first of these is that Satan (1 Chronicles 21:1), is the LORD's unwitting servant (2 Samuel 24:1).**

And you look at the one, 2 Samuel 24:1:

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah."

Alright, that sounds weird. I thought you said, "God does not tempt people with evil"?

He doesn't.

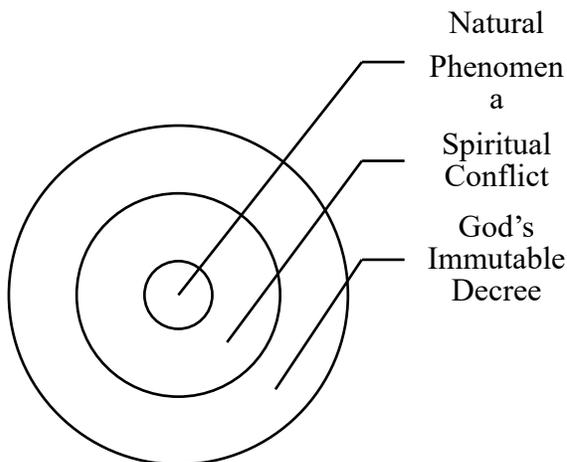
Well, wait a minute, Bob, we've got you now.

Keep your fingers there and go over to 1 Chronicles 21:1, page 657:

“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”

Who did it? **The Bible is a both/and book, not an either/or book.**

Satan did it, but he didn't do it independently of God. In other words, if you remember the little chart that we put up many weeks ago with the three circles, the inner circle is the circle of natural phenomena.



What's going to happen when I let go of these (keys)? I'll ask the young disciples. They'll drop. That's the world of natural phenomena, and that world exists. It's a world of cause and effect. It's why I told you that I'm a fanatical handwasher and have been ever since my mother who taught obstetrical nursing at Vanderbilt taught me as a little boy, "Robert, wash those hands. Wash them, wash them, wash them." And nothing beats it.

Whenever I go into the hospital to visit people, I used to have my assistant pastor mock me. I said, "Okay, Ritchey, the last thing we're going to do as we leave this hospital" – Don't worry about the stupid dispensers they have of that chemical. No, I use those things, but I said, in fact, back then when we first started out, we didn't have those things.

I said, "The last thing we do before we leave this hospital is go in the men's room, run the water, get it warm, lather up your hands with soap and wash your hands thoroughly. Dry them with a paper towel and then use the paper towel to open the door of the bathroom, and then pitch the towel out as you go out of the hospital."

And he always thought, "Oh, Bob." But you know, that Ritchey does that today? He's a pastor in the Kansas City area.

The world is a natural world – natural phenomena. That's why here at Trinity Presbyterian Church, we are obeying government mandates. Why?

Because it's important to contain the coronavirus, because if we don't, our health system will become overtaxed and collapse.

We don't want to have happen in Louisiana and Texas and Arkansas what happened in Wuhan, China, or what's happening in Italy today. Our health care system can manage these things if we don't get too many people at one time, sick.

So, we're going to observe these things because of that inner sphere. The world we live in is a natural world that is governed by a chain, a nexus of cause and effect.

And then there is a big outer circle, and that big outer circle, if you may recall, is a circle that is everything that God has decreed and guess what that is? Everything.

God has ordained whatsoever comes to pass, yet God is not the author of sin nor does he violate the will of the creature or remove the need for second causes, but God is absolutely sovereign.

And in the middle was another sphere.

It's inside the utter, absolute, total control of God, immutable, that is, unchangeable.

It's outside the natural world, but it is the war between Christ and Satan. There is a war. There is spiritual warfare.

We're going to see that more clearly today perhaps than any other time because in a time when we're faced with plague here in Texarkana and throughout the United States and throughout the world, we need to remember something, it is naturally caused.

This strange virus that no one has ever encountered before in human history, and therefore the natural immunities that we get as children – because I was a kid that ate off this and that and didn't always wash my hands. I wasn't as bad as one of my grandchildren who went out and licked the window where I was sitting down studying, and he was outside looking at the window and licked it. I'm not that bad. But we don't have natural immunity to this virus, so therefore we're taking precautions because this is a natural world.

We don't fear because everything that happens in this world is under the overarching sovereignty of God, but this middle circle, the one that encompasses the natural world, but is itself encompassed by God's sovereign decree, is a world where Satan hates you and has a wonderful plan for your life by his standards.

He hates you. He wants to destroy you. He wants to make your life miserable, and he's real, and that's what we see here in 2 Samuel 24:1.

This is the LORD doing it, that's the extreme outer circle. But as we turn over to 1 Chronicles 21, we see that Satan is the unwitting, that means he doesn't know, he's the unwitting servant of God. Let me say that again: Satan is the unwitting servant of God.

Satan is the unwitting servant of God. Satan hates God. He's the original sinner. He wanted to be as God, and one day we'll look at how we really ought to understand two passages of Scripture that are apocalyptic, but we won't get into that today.

He hates God, and so when God authorizes Satan – that's 2 Samuel 24:1 – when God authorizes Satan, Satan, in 1 Chronicles 21:1, is saying, “Hey!”

Satan won't say “hallelujah,” he won't praise the LORD, but he is as happy as a roach in a cracker factory. He's happy. He's glad. He's eager. He wants to destroy King David. He wants to destroy Jerusalem. He wants to wipe out the people of God. That is his goal. That is his desire.

That's his great motivation, and so this begins with a temptation. The temptation is to number God's people. What's wrong with that?

Well, you have to kind of read between the lines. What's wrong with it was David's pride and his wanting to feel secure because of natural things.

You trust in Social Security? I appreciate it. I'm glad that I obeyed the law. I've always paid my Social Security which is called self-employment tax because a minister pays both employers' and the employee's portion. But do you know what? Social Security?

Do you trust your bank account? Do you trust your investments? Whoa, man, what a week in the stock market!

David wanted, in a way – now David was a true believer, but in a way like the rich fool in Jesus' parable who had all of this stuff coming in, and he said, “You've got a whole lot, boy. What are you going to do with all this stuff?”

“I know what I'm going to do, I'm going to build myself bigger barns so I can put it all – stored well. And then I'm going to say to my soul, ‘Soul, take your rest now.’” And what did God say to that man? “You fool, this night this will be required of you and whose will all this be?” (Luke 12:16-20)

So, what is David's sin? I think this requires a bit of speculation, but speculation that is in keeping with the overall thrust of Scripture. David

wanted to feel good about his natural means. Perhaps he was planning some military expedition because his General Joab said, “Don’t do this.”

And David said, “I don’t care. I’m going to do it anyhow.” So David took a census, and it angered God and there’s something that precedes this that we don’t know exactly what it was, but when we anger God – hold on to your hat – when we anger God, he will allow us to be tempted in ways that we cannot withstand, and what I mean by that is this:

Ecclesiastes and Proverbs both teach a fundamental principle: When a human being falls into the sin of adultery, it’s because God was angry with that person. What? God pulls back the hedge and allows a person to do things that a person would not do otherwise (Proverbs 22:14; Ecclesiastes 7:26).

I’ve often asked myself the question over the years – and I counseled so many people because I was free: “How do good people commit adultery?”

And by that I don’t mean perfect people. I’m talking about people who may be real believers. They’re careless and what happens is when someone angers God from something else, God pulls back the hedge and allows that person to fall into sin.

What’s the result of that? Do you know what the result is? If a person is truly a believer, that person’s heart will smite him terribly. You see, the test of whether I’m born again or not isn’t, do I ever sin, of course, people sin; it’s when we’re convicted by the Holy Spirit, what do we do? A real believer, someone who truly is trusting in Christ for salvation, will repent sooner or later.

So, David fell into sin. His sin with Bathsheba was a direct result of David’s laziness and pride and self-trust. He stayed home when he should have been doing what he was supposed to do and this sin, as we try to line Scripture up, is that God pulled back the hedge and allowed David to do this, and God used Satan to tempt him.

Now I want to move quickly with this. Staying over in 1 Chronicles 21 for a bit, in verse 1, “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”

Now go over across the page, 657, where we’re told that this command was also evil in the sight of God, so he punished Israel. Why is God punishing Israel for the sin of one man? Do you know what? We don’t understand how the world really works. Do you know why?

Because every single one of you here has been steeped in the radicalization of the Democratic ideal. What do I mean by that? Those highfalutin words? It simply means that the trouble with modern America is the idea that everybody is absolutely equal and that everybody's actions only affect himself. That's not God's way.

God's way is that for me as a pastor, what I do will affect you. What I do will affect my wife. What I do will affect my children and grandchildren. No one is an island. None of us is, and none of us acts alone.

So, when David who was the head of the state, in the sense we call that federal headship, not that they had government like ours, but he was the head of the nation, and so when David sinned, the result was disaster on the nation.

Verse 8, "Then David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.'

**We also discover that God sent something like bubonic plague (דֵבֵר, dever) (2 Samuel 24:13, 15; 1 Chronicles 21:12,14), and that the LORD's instrument, his sword (1 Chronicles 21:12), was an angel of death (1 Chronicles 21:15).**

The LORD said to Gad," that was the prophet Gad, "David's seer, 'Go and tell David, "This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'"

Now, let me ask you the question: Does that work exactly the same in the New Testament as in the Old? And I'm going to give you an answer: Yes and no.

Yes, God still chastens people for the sins of one person. But no, there's a difference if we consider Romans 5 again, because Jesus is the second Adam, and he bore our sins. We appeal to Jesus. But also, we have to say this: God still deals with nations today. Nations rise and nations fall.

No, God prospers through means, and so David sinned, and the judgment came on the nation, and God gives him three options – I'm grateful that I don't have three options over something like that. Do you know what I'm going to do if I get a message like that? I'm going to say, "LORD, I want a lawyer," and I'm going to say, "I have a lawyer." We have an advocate with the Father, a lawyer, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). I'm going to call my lawyer.

Alright, so Gad tells this to David and look at the options: three years of famine; three months of being swept away before your enemies with their swords overtaking you; or three days of the sword of the LORD, days of plague in the land (דֵּבֵר, *dever*), plague. Scholars believe it was bubonic plague.

Now notice David's response. He says in verse 13:

David said to Gad, "I'm in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the LORD for his mercy is very great, but do not let me fall into the hands of men."

David never lost confidence that God is merciful, and we'll see in this passage in a moment how he was.

Verse 14, page 658, "So the LORD sent a (דֵּבֵר, *dever*) on Israel and 70,000 men of Israel fell dead."

Verse 15, "And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem."

That, by the way, is described in the verses we just read on the other page as the sword of the LORD. God sent an angel.

Jewish people call the angel of death the *Malakh ha-mavet* (מַלְאֲכֵי הַמָּוֶת), the angel of death. The angel of death. My guess is this was the angel of death. Was this a good angel? Well, I'm reading 1 Chronicles 21:1, I don't think so.

You mean that God would authorize a demonic principality to do something like this? And the answer of the Bible is, yes. Wow. I don't like that. Hey, I don't like it either, but I've got to believe it because this is the word of God.

**But then we discover that when the leaders of God's people humbled themselves and begged God, he regretted what he had done.**

In keeping with God's absolute sovereignty and immutable decree, he changed his mind (נָחַם, *nāḥam*) (1 Chronicles 21:15). The Bible is a both/and book, rather than an either/or volume.

The LORD used this dreadful tragedy to reveal the place for his temple (1 Chronicles 21:24-30; 22:1-5).

So, God authorized an angel who brought death to come and to begin to destroy his people. Now, look at this amazing story as we see it here in verse 15 as he says,

"And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem but as the angel was doing so, the LORD saw it and was grieved (he changed his mind (נָחַם, *nāḥam*))

because of the calamity and said to the angel who was destroying the people, 'Enough, withdraw your hand.'”

You see, David knew something, David knew that God loved his people, David knew that even though people suffer, he loved his people. He didn't do this because he hated them. And I say this, if I am a believer – and I do know that I am a real Christian because I'm going to give you the first answer that's not adequate.

On September 4, 1964 on the third floor of the First Presbyterian Church of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Sunday school building, I committed my life to Jesus Christ.

But had there been no evidence, I couldn't base my salvation on that past event. The only past event that we can base our salvation on is something that occurred around AD 30, that's the Lord Jesus Christ. I have to have my assurance related to a changed life.

What is the number one mark of a changed life?

When you sin and when you become convicted of that sin, will you sooner or later repent. That's the mark of a Christian.

In other words, a Christian is somebody who sins more than he wants to. What?

No, you see what I mean. David is convicted. David repents. David casts himself on God's mercy, and God shows David mercy and the whole nation mercy.

Now I'm going to finish the story without going through it verse by verse, but what happens is something beautiful.

This dreadful bubonic plague that God authorized through Satan's temptation and through this angel of death's actions resulted in an amazing thing. What did it result in?

David goes to a pagan man who lived inside the city. He was a Jebusite called Araunah, and David saw where the angel stood – David actually saw this angel, verse 16,

“David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown.”

What is the President of the United States asking you to do today? Fall down. Fall down before him and beg his help, and the beautiful thing is when David and the elders did that, God holds the angel's hand back:

“Hold it right there!”

But the angel's still there, the angel's still standing in there with that sword of bubonic plague, (דֵּבֵר, dever), and David sees where it is, and he goes over to this Jebusite and he said, “I want to buy the property from you.”

And the man says, “Oh no, no, no, no, you're the king, man. I know how politics work. I'm going to give you a gift.”

Isn't that how it works? “I'm going to give you a gift.”

And David said, “I will not worship the LORD with that which costs me nothing” (1 Chronicles 21:24). And so, David buys first the little piece of land where the actual temple itself was built, and then he buys the entire piece of property, and what happens? He offers an offering there, and when he offers the offering, what does God say to Satan's agent? “Get out of here here!”

**Now the practical application of this is this:**

I do not believe that our LORD God is happy with America. I also happen to believe what Louisiana's best and worst governor said.

Who was Louisiana's best governor? Huey Long.

Who was Louisiana's worst governor? Huey Long.

But he made a comment, he said:

“The only difference in the Republicans and the Democrats is like a guy that was selling snake oil medicine, and it was called High Popalorum, and he had another bottle, Low Popahirum.”

And he said, “That's like the Republicans and the Democrats. The one skins you from the bottom up, and the other skins you from the top down.”

Now, what am I saying that for?

I vote. My wife and I vote alike, but we're in two different parties just for fun, to demonstrate that we never argue over politics. What am I saying?

If you're trusting in the Democratic party or the Republican party to save America, you are a fool.

Ain't nobody going to save us but the Lord.

Now, remember the three spheres, take those natural precautions, use the hand sanitizer, but it's not all that effective, wash your hands with warm soapy water and dry them, and if you have to go to a McDonald's where they have those stupid blowers, go to their napkins and load up before you go in the bathroom.

Remember that this plague is not just natural; it is supernatural. There's a war going on for the souls of men and women and boys and girls, and that's why we have to pray.

And the beautiful thing in this story is this:

Within the utter, absolute, immutable decree of God, he has ordained that as his people pray, he changes his mind. What? You said immutable, that means unchangeable.

Within the sphere of God's absolute immutable decree, he has ordained to work through means, and God has ordained to work through the prayers of his people.