

2 Samuel 24 - David's Sin in Taking a Census; Consequences; David Purchases the Temple Site

IV. Six appendices testifying to the greatness of the Davidic covenant (21:1—24:25)
(6) David's census and the resulting plague and purchase of the Temple site from Araunah (24:1-25)

2 Samuel 24

(6) David's census and the resulting plague and purchase of the Temple site from Araunah (24:1-25) (Cf. 1 Chr 21:1-6)

1 Now the anger of the LORD burned against Israel again, and He incited David against them to say, "Go, count Israel and Judah."

1 Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."

1 Later, God's anger blazed forth against Israel, so he incited David to move against them by telling him, "Go take a census of Israel and Judah."

1 And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

- It is impossible to determine the date of this episode from 2 Samuel alone, but the parallel version in 1 Chr 21 places it just prior to David's instructions to Solomon about building the temple (1 Chr 21:28—22:19)

— This census must have come late in David's reign, and may have been part of the plan of dynastic succession in anticipation of Solomon's coming to power

— Most scholars believe David ordered the census in about 975 BC

For reasons not stated, the LORD was angry against Israel (the "again" of v1 may refer to the three-year famine of 21:1), and He led David to command that a census be taken. In 1 Chr 21:1 this motivation is attributed to "a *satan*" (or adversary). This is no contradiction, for the Lord had simply allowed Satan to prompt David to an improper course of action in order that Israel might be punished and that David might be instructed. Where Satan tempts, God designs to test us to show us our sinfulness and His gracious work (Deut 8:2; Job 23:10; Ps 26:2; Is 48:10). God used an adversary to bring judgment on the objects of his anger. This is similar to the Lord's permitting Satan to trouble Job (Job 1:12; 2:6; Cf.

Acts 2:23), and His allowing an evil spirit to torment Saul (1 Sam 16:14). The Cross demonstrates even Satan's most evil acts ultimately accomplish God's perfect plan (Acts 2:23-24; Rom 8:32). Satan can only do what God allows.

We can identify perhaps four levels of causality in v1. God was the final cause, the primary instrumental cause was Satan, the secondary instrumental cause was some hostile human enemy, and David was the efficient cause. The Lord was angry with Israel for some reason. He evidently allowed Satan to stir up hostile enemy forces to threaten David and Israel (Cf. Job 1-2). In response to this military threat, David chose to number the people. David's choice was not his only option; he chose to number the people. He sinned because he failed to trust God. The Lord did not force David to sin...for "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

2 So the king said to Joab the commander of the army, who was with him, "Roam about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and conduct a census of the people, so that I may know the number of the people."

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."

2 So the king ordered Joab, commander of the special forces, who was with him, "Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba and take a census of the people so I can be made aware of the total number."

2 For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people.

- The reasons for David's desire for a census are not clear either, though the fact that he only had military men counted (v2,9) suggests that he was interested in determining his military strength

— After the revolutions of both Absalom and Sheba, it would have been reasonable for David to reassess his military situation against the possibility of similar uprisings

— And herein lay the sin—a census in and of itself was not sinful (Cf. Ex 30:11-12; Num 1:1-2)—God Himself twice commanded a census during Israel's 40 years in the wilderness (Num 1:1-2; 26:2). David probably did this so he could boast in human might. He was placing his confidence in the number of his soldiers rather than in the Lord. This may be implied in Joab's query as to why the census was to be undertaken. God was able, Joab said, to multiply their troops as much as necessary, so why did David feel the need to assess his strength?

3 But Joab said to the king, "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 *can still* see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?"

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?"

3 But Joab replied, "May the LORD your God increase the population of the people a hundredfold while your majesty the king is still alive to see it happen! But why does your majesty the king want to do this?"

3 And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?

- Joab recognized David's error, but obeyed David's order. However, he wisely warned David of his folly. Even a man such as Joab could see that what David planned to do was wrong.

— 1 Chr 21:6 states that David's command was abhorrent to Joab

4 Nevertheless, the king's order prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army left the presence of the king to conduct a census of the people of Israel.

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.

4 But the king's order overruled Joab and the commanders of the special forces, so Joab and the commanders of the special forces left David's presence to take a census of the people of Israel.

4 Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel.

- David chose to ignore Joab's counsel; David behaved as one who refuses to be accountable to anyone, which was easy for him to do since he was king

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.

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.

5 They crossed the Jordan River, encamped at Aroer south of the town that is located in the river valley, proceeding through Gad and then on toward Jazer.

5 And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the river 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,

6 Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi, and they came to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon,

6 They went on to Gilead and the territory of Tahtim-hodshi, then on toward Dan. From Dan they went around to Sidon

6 Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtimhodshi; and they came to Danjaan, and about to Zidon,

7 then they 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.

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.

7 and arrived at the fortified city of Tyre and all of the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Eventually they proceeded to Beer-sheba in the Judean Negev.

7 And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beersheba.

8 So when they had roamed about through the whole land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

8 So when they had gone about through the whole land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

8 After they had traveled throughout the entire land, they returned to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and 20 days.

8 So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

- In support of the theory that David could boast in human might (Cf. v2), Joab and the commanders were able to take over nine months to complete the count. This suggests very peaceful conditions in Israel.

9 And Joab gave the number of the census of the people to the king: in Israel there were eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

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.

9 Joab reported the total number of men to the king. In Israel there were 800,000 men trained for war. In Judah there were 500,000.

9 And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

- Beginning in the Transjordan they went counterclockwise north to Dan Jaan (a variation of Dan), then west and southwest of Sidon and Tyre, throughout the plains and valleys of Canaanite and Hivite (Horites or Hurrians) population, and south to Beersheba.

— The territory described included, but did not extend as far as, all the territory that God promised Abraham

— Finally, after nine months and 20 days, the report was given; there were 800,000 eligible fighting men in Israel and 500,000 in Judah (v9).

The figures in 1 Chr 21:5 are 1,100,000 men in Israel and 470,000 in Judah, but the Chronicler wrote that the Levites and Benjamites were not included (1 Chr 21:5-6). The reconciliation of the data may lie in the possibility that 1,100,000 describes the grand total for Israel, including the standing army which consisted of 12 units of 24,000 men each (288,000, 1 Chr 27:1-15) plus 12,000 especially attached to Jerusalem and the chariot cities (2 Chr 1:14). These 300,000 subtracted from 1,100,000 would yield the 800,000 figure in 2 Sam 24:9. Also, the 470,000 in 1 Chr 21 may have omitted the Benjamites (Cf. 1 Chr 21:6), or the Chronicler may not have included the 30,000-man standing army of Judah (6:1) whereas they were included here. Either would raise the 470,000 total of Chronicles to the 500,000 of Samuel. This is only one solution. Another may be that Joab never finished the census (Cf. 1 Chr 27:23-24).

10 Now David's heart troubled him after he had counted the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, LORD, please overlook the guilt of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."

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."

10 Later, David's conscience bothered him after he had numbered the army, so David told the LORD, "I have sinned greatly by what I did. But now I am asking you, please remove the guilt of your servant, since I have acted very foolishly."

10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

- After David received the report, he realized his sin of pride and self-sufficiency and confessed this sin (which he called a "very foolish thing") to the LORD (1 Chr 21:7 points out that the Lord punished Israel, thus indicating the evil of the census)
- David genuinely repented, yet could not escape the consequences of his sin

11 When David got up in the morning, the word of the LORD came to Gad the prophet, David's seer, saying,

11 When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

11 Before David arose the next morning, this message from the LORD came to Gad, David's seer:

11 For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

12 "Go and speak to David, 'This is what the LORD says: "I am imposing upon you three *choices*; choose for yourself one of them, and I will do *it* to you.'"

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.'"

12 "Go tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: "I'm holding three choices out for you: pick one of them for yourself, and I will do it to you.'"

12 Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

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 for three months before your enemies while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' of plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to Him who sent me."

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."

13 So Gad went to David and asked him, "Shall seven years of famine come to your land, or three months of reversals while you flee from your enemies as they pursue you, or three days of pestilence in your land? Decide right now what I am to answer to the one who sent me."

13 So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they

pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.

- The Lord sent Gad, a prophet, to David with a list of three calamities from which he could choose and by which the Lord would register His displeasure and purge out the evil

- "...seven" - though the Hebrew reads "seven" years of famine, the probably a better-preserved text (1 Chr 21:12) reads "three" as the NIV has it

— The choices were: three years of famine; three months of enemy pursuit, or three days of pestilence.

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 human hands."

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."

14 So David replied to Gad, "This is a very difficult choice for me to make! Let me now please fall into the hand of the LORD, since his mercy is very great, but may I never fall into human hands!"

14 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. David chose the third option, throwing himself on the mercy of God.

- David chose to leave the decision up to the Lord because he had learned that God is merciful

15 So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.

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.

15 That very morning, the LORD sent a pestilence to Israel until the conclusion of the time designated, and 70,000 men died from Dan to Beer-sheba.

15 So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.

16 When the angel extended his hand *toward* Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD **relented** of the disaster and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now drop your hand!" And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

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.

16 As the angel was stretching out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity, so he told the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Stay your hand!" So the angel of the LORD remained near the threshing floor that belonged to Araunah the Jebusite.

16 And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.

- "...relented" - changed His mind

— But Num 23:19 says God does not change His mind (Cf. notes on Ex 32:14)

- When Jerusalem itself was threatened, the LORD intervened and commanded His angelic destroyer to desist. David then confessed his own personal sin and urged the LORD to spare His innocent people.

— In order to make proper restitution and atonement, David arranged to construct an altar to the LORD. Gad told him that it must be built on the threshing floor of Araunah, a citizen of Jerusalem, since it was there that the angel had been commanded to cease his destruction of the city.

— This threshing floor was a saddleback with a wide, smooth, ledge-like surface at about 741 meters above sea level just outside the northern wall of David's Jerusalem, on the ridge system known as Mount Moriah.

17 Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house!"

17 Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house."

17 When David saw the angel who had been attacking the people, he told the LORD, "Look, I'm the one who has sinned! I did the evil. These are only sheep! What did they do? Please, let your hand fall on me and on my household!"

17 And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.

- Evidently the angel who was killing the people was visible to David as the angel entered Jerusalem, prepared to kill more innocent victims of David's sin there (Cf. 2 Kings 6:17)

18 So Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

18 So Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

18 That very day, Gad approached David and told him, "Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor that belongs to Araunah the Jebusite."

18 And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.

- David needed to commit himself again to the Lord (burnt offering) and renew his fellowship with God (peace offering, v25)

— God instructed him to present these offerings at the place where He had shown mercy (v16)

— According to Josephus, Abraham offered his son Isaac for a burnt offering in this same location [Josephus, 13:4]. While this is a consensus view, it's likely inaccurate (see note on v25).

19 Then David went up in accordance with the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded.

19 David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded.

19 So David went up, just as Gad had ordered, consistent with the LORD's command.

19 And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded.

- Only repentance could turn the situation around: when David agreed to obey God's will revealed through Gad, he immediately began to become a source of blessing again

20 And **Araunah** looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; so Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king.

20 Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king.

20 When Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his staff approaching him. Araunah went out, bowed down before the king with his face on the ground,

20 And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him:

and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground.

- "...Araunah" - Ornan (1 Chr 21); a native Jebusite

21 Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, so that the plague may be withdrawn from the people."

21 Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be held back from the people."

21 and asked him, "Why has your majesty the king come to his servant?"

David replied, "To purchase your threshing floor and to build an altar to the LORD, so the pestilence can be averted from the people."

21 And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshing floor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people.

- When Araunah learned of David's desire, however, he was willing not only to give the threshing floor to the king but also to provide the wood and sacrifices needed (v22)

22 Araunah then said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, *here are* the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood.

22 Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood.

22 Araunah responded to David, "May your majesty the king take it and offer whatever pleases him. Here are oxen for a burnt offering, along with the threshing sledges and yokes from the oxen for wood!

22 And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood.

23 Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God be favorable to you."

23 Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you."

23 Your majesty, Araunah gives all of this to the king." Araunah also told the king, "May the LORD your God be pleased with you!"

23 All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee.

24 However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will certainly buy *it* from you for a price; for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

24 However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy *it* from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

24 "No!" the king replied to Araunah. "I will buy them from you at full price. I won't offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 silver shekels,

24 And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

- To this gracious offer David could only give a negative response. How could he sacrifice to the LORD what cost him nothing? That would be a denial of the very meaning of sacrifice.

— Araunah therefore sold him the threshing floor and oxen for 50 shekels of silver (1-1/2 lbs of silver)

— The 600 shekels (15 lbs) of gold (1 Chr 21:25) also included the lot of land surrounding the threshing floor

25 Then David built there an altar to the LORD, and he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the LORD responded to prayer for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.

25 David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.

25 built an altar to the LORD there, and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD answered David's prayers for the land and the pestilence on Israel was averted.

25 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

- Having obtained the site, David built the altar, offered the sacrifices, and interceded on behalf of his people. God heard and answered, and the land was healed of the plague.

— On this same spot Solomon later constructed his magnificent temple (1 Chr 22:1; 2 Chr 3:1)

There is a widespread tradition that this was where Abraham had offered Isaac (Gen 22:2); however, we believe that this occurred at the peak of Mt. Moriah, 777 meters above sea level, further north, outside the "Damascus Gate," where the Garden Tomb can presently be seen.

Solomon's temple became the centerpiece of Israel for hundreds of years. It was the place where God met with His people and they worshipped Him corporately, the center of their

spiritual and national life. Therefore the mention of the purchase of Araunah's threshing floor was the first step in the building of the temple, the source of incalculable blessing to come (Cf. Gen 23:3-16).