

Bible Study October 30, 2024

2 SAMUEL 24 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

David's Census

¹ Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah."

Did God cause David to sin? God does not cause people to sin, but he does allow sinners to reveal the sinfulness of their hearts by their actions. God presented the opportunity of taking a census to David in order to confront David's personal pride and deal with Israel's disastrous national tendency to take pride in their own military strength rather than trusting in God's protection. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, Scripture says that Satan incited David to take the census. Israelite writers did not always distinguish between primary and secondary causes. So if God allowed Satan to tempt David, to them it would have been the same as if God had done it.

² So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, "Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people." 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 still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?"

What was wrong with taking a census? A census was commanded in Numbers to prepare an army for conquering the Promised Land (Numbers 1:2; 26:2). A census amounted to a draft or conscription for the army. The land was now at peace, so there was no need to enlist troops. The nation of Israel had extended its borders and become a recognized power. David's sin was pride and ambition in counting the people so that he could glory in the size of his nation and army, its power and defenses. By doing this, he put his faith in the size of his army rather than in God's ability to protect them regardless of their number. Even Joab knew a census was wrong, but David did not heed his advice. We sin in a similar way when we place our security in money, possessions, or the might of our nation.

⁴ But the king's word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people of Israel. ⁵ They crossed the Jordan and began from Aroer, and from the city that is in the middle of the valley, toward Gad and on to Jazer. ⁶ Then they came to Gilead, and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites; and they came to Dan, and from Dan they went around to Sidon, ⁷ and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites; and they went out to the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba. ⁸ So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. ⁹ And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000.

The Lord's Judgment of David's Sin

¹⁰ But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And 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 done very foolishly." ¹¹ And when David arose in the

morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹² "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.'" ¹³ So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall three 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 decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." ¹⁴ Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

Both David and the Israelites were guilty of sin (24:1). David's sin was pride, but the Bible does not say why God was angry with the people of Israel. Perhaps it was due to their support of the rebellions of Absalom (2 Samuel 15–18) and Sheba (2 Samuel 20), or perhaps they had put their security in military and financial prosperity rather than in God, as David had done. God dealt with the whole nation through David, who exemplified the national sin of pride.

God gave David three choices. Each was a form of punishment God had said the people could expect if they disobeyed his laws (plague—Deuteronomy 28:20-22; famine—28:23-24; and war—28:25-26). David wisely chose the form of punishment that came most directly from God. He knew how brutal men in war could be, and he also knew God's great mercy. When you sin greatly, turn back to God. To be punished by him is far better than to take your chances without him.

¹⁵ So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. ¹⁶ And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. ¹⁷ Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house."

David Builds an Altar

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

Many believe that this threshing floor where David built the altar is the location where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). After David's death, Solomon built the Temple on this spot. Centuries later, Jesus would teach and preach here. Today this area is called the Temple Mount and is a sacred area for Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

¹⁹ So David went up at Gad's word, as the Lord commanded. ²⁰ And when Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming on toward him. And Araunah went out and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground. ²¹ And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be averted from the people." ²² Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. ²³ All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you." ²⁴ But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. 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. ²⁵ And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

The book of 2 Samuel describes David’s reign. Since the Israelites first entered the Promised Land under Joshua, they had been struggling to unite the nation and drive out the wicked inhabitants. Now, after more than 400 years, Israel was finally at peace. David had accomplished what no leader before him, judge or king, had done. His administration was run on the principle of dedication to God and to the well-being of the people. Yet David also sinned. Despite his sins, however, the Bible calls David a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) because when he sinned, he recognized it and confessed his sins to God. David committed his life to God and remained loyal to him throughout his lifetime. The book of Psalms gives an even deeper insight into David’s love for God.