

1 Chronicles 21 – David’s Numbering of Israel

Introduction

David’s life provides an example to us of a right heart during the times he followed God as well as how such a heart returns to God when it has strayed.

¹Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. ²So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, “Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring me word that I may know their number.”

³Joab said, “May the LORD add to His people a hundred times as many as they are! But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord’s servants? Why does my lord seek this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt to Israel?” ⁴Nevertheless, the king’s word prevailed against Joab.

Therefore, Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. ⁵Joab gave the number of the census of all the people to David. And all Israel were 1,100,000 men who drew the sword; and Judah was 470,000 men who drew the sword. ⁶But he did not number Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king’s command was abhorrent to Joab. ⁷God was displeased with this thing, so He struck Israel. ⁸David said to God, “I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

2 Samuel 24:1 -- Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

[Read 1 Chronicles 21:1-8 and 2 Samuel 24:1]

Q: 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that it was Satan who moved David to number Israel, yet 2 Samuel 24:1 states that it was the Lord who moved David to number Israel. Is there a contradiction? What’s going on here?

A: First, understand that there’s about a 20 year gap between chapters 20 and 21 in 1 Chronicles. During that period 2 Samuel 14-20 documents David’s sin of adultery with Bath-sheeba, the murder and cover-up of Uriah, the sins of Amnon, the revolt of Sheba, and most notably the revolt and rebellion against David (not just the king but also the “Lord’s anointed”) by Absalom (which lasted 11 years and there were many in Israel who followed Absalom). So the Lord’s anger burned against Israel because of their sins against the “LORD’S anointed.”

What did we learn about Satan in the book of Job? He is an instrument of God to bring judgment on Israel, and David is but an instrument of Satan to execute the plan. God is bringing about a judgment on Israel for their having been rebellious toward David, using Satan to accomplish His task through David. Just as in Job where Satan is allowed by God to bring trials and afflictions to Job.

Q. How many times to date have we seen specific reference to Satan in Scripture?

A: This is the first instance in Scripture where Satan is referred to and actually given a name. In Job he is referred to as “**the** adversary.” Here there is no definite article (“the”) and “Satan” now becomes his name. In other words, just as Hebrew names describe a situation or relationship, Satan’s name describes his nature.

This is also true of the Messiah. Throughout Scripture He is referred to as “**the** Anointed One”. But in Daniel, and from that time forward, the definite article (“the”) is dropped and He is simply referred to as “Messiah.” He has become His name which reflects His nature.

Q: Why did Satan get the opportunity to use David to bring judgment on Israel? That is, how did Satan “get to” David?

A: David seems to have ordered the census because he was placing his trust in “multiplied troops” rather than in the promises of God. The avenue by which Satan got to David, therefore, was David’s pride. Pride always places trust in ourselves above trust in God.

Application:

- *Is there a price we pay for putting our trust in something other than God?*
- *How do we know we’re putting our trust in something (or someone) else other than God?*

Q: David had a chance to change his mind about taking the census. What did he fail to do?

A: He failed to listen to the counsel of others, in this case Joab. Perhaps a way to tell when someone is conveying something important to us that

we're not immediately understanding is when, as in Joab's case, their assertion contains the concept of sin, guilt, and/or spiritual consequences. (Be a Berean.)

⁹The Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹⁰"Go and speak to David, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "I offer you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you.'""

¹¹So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Take for yourself ¹²either three years of famine, or three months to be swept away before your foes, while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of the Lord, even pestilence in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now, therefore, consider what answer I shall return to Him who sent me."

¹³David said to Gad, "I am in great distress; please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great. But do not let me fall into the hand of man."

¹⁴So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel; 70,000 men of Israel fell. ¹⁵And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but as he was about to destroy it, the Lord saw and was sorry over the calamity, and said to the destroying angel, "It is enough; now relax your hand." And the angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. ¹⁶Then David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, with his drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, covered with sackcloth, fell on their faces. ¹⁷David said to God, "Is it not I who commanded to count the people? Indeed, I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done? O Lord my God, please let Your hand be against me and my father's household, but not against Your people that they should be plagued."

¹⁸Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. ¹⁹So David went up at the word of Gad, which he spoke in the name of the Lord.

²⁰Now Ornan turned back and saw the angel, and his four sons who were with

[Read 9-13]

Q: What is the lesson we can learn from David when we're experiencing our own hour of judgment?

A: "...please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great...."

[Read 14-17]

Q: Was David's choice for God's hand and mercy justified?

A: Yes. The Lord had mercy and halted complete execution of His judgment.

Note that David and the elders were "in sackcloth", an indication that they were **ALREADY** in mourning and therefore in the process of submitting humbly to the Lord. David didn't need to see the angel before personally repenting – he'd already begun to do so **WITHOUT** seeing the angel. He took God at His word.

Q: Is it fair that David's sin should lead to the punishment of the whole nation?

A: Yes, first of all, because as discussed this was probably not for David's sin alone but for the sins of the Nation during the preceding years.

Yes, second of all, because God specifically stipulated that should the people choose to have an earthly king reign over them that the king's sin/righteousness would be born by the people as we saw in many examples through Samuel and Kings.

[Read 18-27]

Q: When did God answer David – before he made the sacrifice or after?

A: Before. God accepted David's **PRAYER** as a reflection of his heart. The acceptance of the sacrifice was a sign from God that David's heart was in the right place, not that David was justified through the act of sacrifice.

Q: What two things are significant about Ornan's threshing floor where they

him hid themselves. And Ornan was threshing wheat. ²¹As David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out from the threshing floor and prostrated himself before David with his face to the ground. ²²Then David said to Ornan, "Give me the site of this threshing floor, that I may build on it an altar to the Lord; for the full price you shall give it to me, that the plague may be restrained from the people."

²³Ornan said to David, "Take it for yourself; and let my lord the king do what is good in his sight. See, I will give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for wood and the wheat for the grain offering; I will give it all." ²⁴But King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing." ²⁵So David gave Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the site.

²⁶Then David built an altar to the Lord there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And he called to the Lord and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.

²⁷The Lord commanded the angel, and he put his sword back in its sheath.

saw the angel and David built the altar?

A: Genesis 22:1-2, "Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Meriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.'" This is the site where that sacrifice took place.

It's also the site where all the temples are built. (see 22:1)

Q: What was God's immediate and ultimate goals in allowing Satan to move David to number Israel?

A: The immediate goal was to bring judgment on Israel for her sins including repeated revolts against God's anointed king whether David deserved it or not.

The ultimate goal was positive, ensuring that the results of it all would mean the establishment of His altar and temple.

One of the lessons we can learn from David is not just his right heart during the times he followed God but his right heart in turning to God when he strayed.

Q: How is this location significance to believer's today?

A: The Last Sacrifice (Jesus) ended the need for a temple and for a Holy of Holies.

Conclude by reading Hebrews 9:1-14:

¹Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. ²For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. ³Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, ⁴having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; ⁵and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹²and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

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