

### David Numbers Israel; The Future Site for Solomon's Temple

#### 1 Chronicles 21

**1 Chronicles 20:1-7** - *"Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. <sup>2</sup> So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it."*

*<sup>3</sup> And Joab answered, "May the LORD make His people a hundred times more than they are! But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?" <sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Therefore Joab departed and went throughout all Israel and returned to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to David. All Israel had 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and Judah had 470,000 men who drew the sword. <sup>6</sup> But he did not include Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab.*

*<sup>7</sup> And God was displeased with this; therefore He struck Israel. <sup>8</sup> So David said to God, "I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."*

*<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, <sup>10</sup> "Go and tell David, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you.'"" <sup>11</sup> So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Choose for yourself, <sup>12</sup> either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the LORD - a plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now consider what answer I should take back to Him who sent me." <sup>13</sup> And David 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."*

*<sup>14</sup> So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. <sup>15</sup> And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the LORD looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

*<sup>16</sup> Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. <sup>17</sup> And David said to God, "Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O LORD my God, be against me and my father's house, but not against Your people, that they should be plagued."*

#### Background Notes

When we compare this account in 1 Chronicles 21 with the parallel account of David's census in 2 Samuel 24, we notice some distinct differences that must be harmonized. First of all, 2 Samuel 24:1 says, *“Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go number Israel and Judah.’”* But 1 Chronicles 21:1 says, *“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”*

What's the answer? Did Satan move David to take a census of the people of Israel, or was it God's anger that resulted in David numbering the people? The answer is - **both**. James 1:13 makes it clear that God is not the source of evil. He does not lead people to do evil, and He cannot be blamed for evil that people do. The answer is that God allowed Satan to tempt David. At times, and for His own sovereign purposes, God can allow Satan to act. David was drawn away by his own kingly pride, and he sinned by numbering the people. But God used this occasion to discipline the entire nation of Israel. The Lord was angry with the nation of Israel, probably because their national pride dishonored Him (2 Samuel 24).

The variation in the total numbers given in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 is probably the difference between Israel's standing army and those who could be called on to bear arms in time of war. The difference between the price of 50 shekels (2 Samuel 24:24) and 600 shekels (1 Chronicles 21:25) is easily resolved. The cost of the threshing floor itself was 50 shekels, but David bought the whole site, with its surrounding area, for 600 shekels.

## Doctrinal Point

### 1. God disapproved of David's sinful census.

God was displeased that David numbered the people (v7). Even Joab, who was certainly not known for his godly counsel, told David not to take this sinful census. But David didn't listen, and the Lord sent a plague on Israel that killed 70,000 Israeli men (v14). Why was it so wrong for David to take a census, even if it was for military purposes? In the book of Numbers a census of Israel was taken **twice** (Number 1 & 26), and both were for military purposes - but the Lord directed both of them. And Israel was to take a census periodically, to number the people for the purpose of taxation and for support of the House of the Lord (Exodus 30). So why was it wrong for David to number the people in 1 Chronicles 21? What was so sinful, that 70,000 people died as a result?

The one word answer is **“pride.”** It was up to **God** to command a census. God had given David victories over all his enemies, so there was no need to take a military census. Taking a census indicated David was turning away from trusting in the Lord, to trusting in David's own military strength – turning from thanking the Lord, to giving credit to his own military forces. David was proud of his military strength. It added to his personal glory as king!

David's pride was also a reflection of the national pride of all Israel, and that's why God judged the nation, not just David. God hates the sin of pride! And what does this account say about our own country? We used to give God the credit for our victories and blessings. Now we take the credit ourselves. We're proud of our military strength - and the almighty dollar gets the credit. We are no longer thankful to God. “In God We Trust” is being replaced with “United We Stand.”

The good news is that David repented when he was confronted with his sin. But there are consequences to forgiven sin, and there must be discipline for sin. So God gave David a choice - three years of famine, three months of military defeat, or three days of plague from the sword of the Lord. David chose the three days of plague - not because it was shorter, but because it would be more directly from the hand of the Lord. David knew God to be a God of mercy - and David was right (v15). But 70,000 Israeli men died because of the sin of pride. God disapproved of David's sinful census.

## 2. God approved of David's substitutionary sacrifice.

**1 Chronicles 21:18-30** - *"Therefore, the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. <sup>19</sup> So David went up at the word of Gad, which he had spoken in the name of the LORD. <sup>20</sup> Now Ornan turned and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid, but Ornan continued threshing wheat. <sup>21</sup> So David came to Ornan, and Ornan looked and saw David. And he went out from the threshing floor, and bowed before David with his face to the ground. <sup>22</sup> Then David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the LORD. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." <sup>23</sup> But Ornan said to David, "Take it to yourself, and let my lord the king do what is good in his eyes. Look, I also give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give it all."*

*<sup>24</sup> Then King David said to Ornan, "No. I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing." <sup>25</sup> So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place. <sup>26</sup> And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.*

*<sup>27</sup> So the LORD commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath. <sup>28</sup> And when David saw that the LORD had answered him on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there, <sup>29</sup> for the tabernacle of the LORD and the altar of the burnt offering, which Moses had made in the wilderness, were at that time at the high place in Gibeon. <sup>30</sup> But David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD."*

David purchased the threshing floor of Ornan (or Araunah in 2 Samuel 24), and used it for a place of sacrifice. It was a very significant site. In fact, it's the very site where Solomon built the Temple. It's the site where every Temple in Israel in the past has stood, and where the Temples of the future will be built – both the Tribulation Temple and the Millennial Temple.

We know that God approved of David's sacrifice because when David called to the Lord, God answered him with fire (v26). The Lord commanded the angel, and he returned his sword of judgment to his sheath (v27).

What a picture of salvation – both here, and in Elijah's sacrifice on Mount Carmel. In both situations, **the fire of the Lord fell on the sacrifice - not on the sinful people!** In the same way, **the fire of God's judgment fell on Christ on the**

**cross - and not on us!** We can be saved from the penalty of sin by simple faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as our Substitute - a substitutionary sacrifice. God approved of David's substitutionary sacrifice.

## Practical Application

**Let's be willing to take the blame, rather than shift the blame.**

David was willing to take the full blame for the ordering the census. *"David said to God, "Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O LORD my God, be against me and my father's house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued."*

Why did David take the blame? No doubt that he could have found a few scapegoats, and shifted the blame onto someone else for his bad decision. Probably any number of high-ranking officials told David that a census was a good idea. But David didn't shift the blame onto others. He was repentant, he took the full blame, and he confessed his sin to the Lord.

What about us? Do we look for excuses so we can shift the blame onto someone else for problems we've caused? Or are we willing to take the blame when we make sinful mistakes? Let's face it. We can make bad decisions at our jobs, in our ministries, in our marriages, and in our home life.

Let's be willing to take the blame, rather than shift the blame – and make the necessary changes!