

PREFACE

The final recorded words of King David, as he handed rule of Israel to his son Solomon, were, "Now bless the LORD your God." To the very end David remained true to *Yahweh*, Jehovah, *El Shaddai*, God Almighty. His predecessor's heart turned cold to the Lord, and he lost his faith; most of his successors would not just ignore the Lord their God, but actively, persistently worship other gods, false gods, profane and perverse gods.

But David remained true. His story is not one of perfect living, of supernatural piety resulting in a sinless life. David sinned against God as much as any man. What set him apart from Saul and most of the kings that followed was what he did *after* the sin. His record of humility before God, of repentance and confession, of earnest pleas for restoration become, then, a righteous example for those times when *we* fail, when *we* sin against our God.

Because of this, the prophet Isaiah tells us that the promised Messiah would be established not on the throne of Saul, or on the throne of Jeroboam or Uzziah or Hezekiah, but on the throne of *David*.

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6b-7)

That is a pretty impressive legacy for the once obscure shepherd boy.

A PLAGUE AND AN OFFERING

For our final chapter on David, let's look at his last recorded great sin, what happened as a result of it, and then David's response to that. To do this I will attempt to harmonize our two accounts—one found in 2 Samuel, the other in 1 Chronicles. [Because we will be skipping back and forth between the two texts, I have prepared a one-page handout that includes the complete text.](#)

If we begin in the Chronicles passage, v1 tells us that "Satan" caused David to do this.

Read 1 Chronicles 21:1.

But if we look at the parallel account in 2 Samuel, it says "the anger of the Lord" caused David to do it.

Read 2 Samuel 24:1.

Because our subject is David, and thus our focus on *his* misdeeds, it is easy to miss that in both versions it is "Israel" being moved against. And the best way to harmonize the two versions—"Satan" vs. "anger of the Lord"—is to interpret it in light of the story of Job. This would mean that God is the instigator of the action against Israel, and in this He employs two instruments: Satan and David.

This means that while we are here to witness what David will be doing that displeases the Lord, in v1 God is looking back at *Israel's* displeasing behavior, and setting up *their* discipline. For what? No doubt their many sins, their rejection of His law, and their repeated revolts against the Lord's anointed king.

So David, under the influence of Satan who, in turn, has been given the go-ahead by Yahweh, orders Joab to conduct a census. And well we might ask, "Where's the harm in that?" We find the answer to that back in the Law.

Read Exodus 30:12.

David Guzik: The principle of Exodus 30:12 speaks to God's ownership of His people. In the thinking of these ancient cultures, a man only had the right to count or number what belonged to him. Israel didn't belong to David; Israel belonged to God. It was up to the LORD to command a counting, and if David counted he should only do it at God's command and receiv[e] ransom money to "atone" for the counting.

So, when you think about it, this transgression of David's was not unlike the times Saul usurped the Lord's authority by making a priestly sacrifice or determining on his own to save back people and livestock the Lord had ordered killed. This was sin for David because instead of asking God, instead of seeking His will, David decided on his own.

We need to clarify the scope of this census. David's command, found in v2 of both accounts, seems to suggest a census of *all* the people.

Read 2 Samuel 24:2.

The word translated "people" in all but the NIV is the Hebrew *am*, which is one of those general, flexible words that can mean one thing in one context, and something else in another. If David intended it to be a general census of every person, why then did Joab's subsequent report number only fighting men, those "who drew the sword"? This time the NIV has the best translation—and now Joab's objection in v3 makes more sense.

Read 2 Samuel 24:2-4. (NIV)

Back when I was in high school, when a young man reached a certain age, he had to register with the Selective Service, so that he could be drafted for military service. This is what Joab and his commanders were doing: beyond just numbering the men, they were "registering" them, "enrolling" them.

Sidebar: We need an explanation for the discrepancy in the numbers contained in Joab's report between 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel—1,100,00 / 470,000 vs. 800,000 / 500,000. The lower 800,000 figure for Israel in the 2 Samuel passage probably did not include those already in the organized army. The higher figure for Judah in the same passage is probably just a rounding up.

To bottom-line David's sin, by taking a census of all those in the land who could be called up to go to war, David was placing his faith in *them*, rather than the Lord his God. By concerning himself with the number of men at his disposal, he was—at least in this instance, under the influence of Satan—walking by sight, rather than faith.

Then in v10 we have the turning point. Here we see why David is so different from Saul—and why he was called a “man after God's own heart.”

Read 2 Samuel 24:10. (not NKJV)

Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people.

Don't just read something in God's word and blithely move on to the next verse—or even, as here, the next sentence. Stop; think below the surface.

What a remarkable man David was! We have no report that the external forces working on David have suddenly relented; no evidence that Satan, sanctioned by Yahweh had suddenly departed. No, apparently even in that same condition, *David's own heart* “struck” him and drove him to his knees.

troubled^{nasb}, **smote**^{kjv}, **condemned**^{nkjv}, **conscience-stricken**^{niv}, **struck**^{esv} = *naka* (naw-kaw') = a primitive root; to strike (lightly or severely, literal or figurative) :- beat, cast forth, clap, give [wounds], × go forward, × indeed, kill, make [slaughter], murderer, punish, slaughter, slay (-er, -ing), smite (-r, -ing), strike, be stricken, (give) stripes, × surely, wound. (Wilson: “to strike home, to strike deep, so as to wound or kill; or as plants are smitten when they begin to wither.”)

Even *while* Satan is pulling him in the wrong direction, David is cut to the quick; his own heart drives him to his knees before the Lord. How did David know he had “acted very foolishly”—that he had played the fool? Because the Lord was still with him; even with God giving Satan permission to work evil in David's life, the king still belonged to God. His heart still belonged to God.

But that does not mean that punishment will not be meted out. Remember, God's overall purpose is to punish *Israel* (v1). But He must also chastise His servant—even after David's confession and earnest plea. And we might ask: *What about God's grace to a repentant sinner?* That grace is coming—but not yet.

August Disselhoff: Here lies the sinner a night in confession and supplication, and in the morning God sends him—punishment, and therewith no syllable of grace and forgiveness! We observe it with trembling. To the deeply ruined, and long-lost child the father runs with open arms to meet him, and presses him to his heart. Yet when the favored one, who has tasted the power of atonement, loses himself, when he makes the goodness of God a subject of arrogance and presumptuousness, then the Lord comes upon the penitent with the sharp edge of His sword. He must punish, the eternal God, when He sees that the old nature is too tough in the new man, too deep-rooted and grown with His growth... but above all must He then come with the sword, when His grace and His gifts have been made the cause of the self-exaltation.

God, through the prophet Gad, tells the king to select a punishment from three offered.

Read 1 Chronicles 21:11-12.

Sidebar: In all but the NIV and ESV the length of the first option, famine, in the 2 Samuel version of the story is *seven* years instead of three. The apparent discrepancy is probably the result of different original manuscripts and, perhaps, a copyist's mistake in one of them. The Chronicles passage and the Septuagint have three—and three years fits better into the scheme of the three options. So most (but not all) commentators believe that the number of years should be three, rather than seven.

King David chose the last option, and it is important that we know why. We must not forget that the purpose of this is more than just punishing David for his sin, but to punish *Israel* for its sin.

David states, in v14, that his choice is based on his desire to remain in the hand of the Lord, rather than the hand of man. Would that he had held that position when he had been considering the unlawful census, since that decision was just the opposite: in the census he was placing his trust in men over the Lord. His explanation for his choice reveals that he understands the nature of his transgression. David's choice, while still brutal, is the most democratic, the fairest of the three.

Adam Clarke: Had he chosen war, his own personal safety was in no danger, because there was already an ordinance preventing him from going to battle. Had he chosen famine, his own wealth would have secured his and his own family's support. But he showed the greatness of his mind in choosing the pestilence, to the ravages of which himself and his household were exposed equally with the meanest of his subjects.

God's word declares that 70,000 perished because of the pestilence. But most translations—especially the NIV—don't express the full irony of this.

Read 2 Samuel 24:15.

men...from Dan to Beersheba

Where have we heard that before? In v2 of the Samuel passage this was given as the scope of the illegal census. Who was David counting in the census? "Men who drew the sword." I won't take the time here to go into the etymology of the Hebrew word, but Ronald Youngblood posits that it should be translated "*fighting men*," and that "the 'seventy thousand' who died should thus be understood as 'seventy military units.'"

See the irony? In his punishment of Israel and David, the Lord subtracts 70,000 men from the army in which the king was placing his hope. Sometimes when we pursue something in opposition to the Lord's will, He ensures that the result is just the opposite of what we intended.

David makes an impassioned, unselfish plea for the Lord to stop the killing.

David 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." (1 Chronicles 21:17)

In reply, the Lord tells David to go up to the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (1 Chronicles: Ornan; same person, and possibly the last Jebusite king) and erect an altar to the Lord.

There is poetic symmetry to this. Here is the spot where Abraham once held a knife to sacrifice his own son to God (Genesis 22), and here is the spot where David's son Solomon will build the first temple to the Lord.

There are a number of fascinating details in this narrative worthy of our time, but to close this brief look at David, I want to focus on something he says to Araunah, the owner of the site—something that, once again, reveals the true heart of David.

Read 2 Samuel 24:21-24.

...I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing

We live in a time when language has been cheapened. Something as insignificant as finding a parking place is now "awesome," and in doing the most nominal, common-sense thing one can be called a "hero." And the same cheapening of terms has infiltrated our living and worshiping before God.

Even though the phrase "sacrifice of praise" is found in God's word (Hebrews 13:15), I remain uncomfortable putting the two words together, for it costs me nothing to praise my God.

An "offering" or "sacrifice" means "the act of giving up, destroying, permitting injury to, or forgoing something valued for the sake of something having a more pressing claim" (*Webster's*). David told God that *he* was one who had sinned, and God's reply—through the angel, through Gad the prophet—was for *David* to erect an altar and make a burnt offering to the Lord to quell the the plague. If Araunah had funded the whole thing, it would have been *him* making the sacrifice. David was having none of it ("No!"). It must cost *him* to make a burnt offering to the Lord.

Here, once again is shown the heart of David for Yahweh. His life belonged to his God, and he must do the right thing—the righteous thing—in His service.

Read 2 Samuel 24:25.

There's the grace.

CONCLUSION

Herewith three individuals: Rahab, Ruth, and David. Three imperfect, unexpected individuals who loved the Lord God and, each in his or her own way, offered their lives to Him out of gratitude and adoration. Three individuals in the family line leading to Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah, Son of God.

1 Chronicles 21:1-14

1 Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.

2 So 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."

3 Joab 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?"

4 Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab. Therefore, Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem.

5 Joab 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.

6 But he did not number Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's command was abhorrent to Joab.

7 God was displeased with this thing, so He struck Israel.

8 David 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."

9 The 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."'"

11 So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Take for yourself

12 either 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."

13 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."

14 So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel; 70,000 men of Israel fell.

2 Samuel 24:1-4, 8-15, 17-25

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

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."

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?"

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.

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

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.

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."

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

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."'"

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."

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."

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.

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."

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."

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

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.

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."

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.

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

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.

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.