

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 24

David's Census

Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” 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?” 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.

24:1 *Again.* The previous occasion may have been the famine of 21:1. (CSB)

the anger of the LORD kindled against Israel. The specific reason for the Lord's displeasure is not stated. Because the anger is said to be directed against Israel rather than David, some have concluded that it was occasioned by the widespread support among the people for the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba against David (see 15:12; 17:11, 24–26; 18:7; 20:1–2), the divinely chosen and anointed theocratic king. This would mean that the events of this chapter are to be placed chronologically shortly after those of chs. 15–20 and so after 980 B.C. (CSB)

incited David against them. 1Ch 21:1 says that Satan inspired David to take the census. Although Scripture is clear that God does not cause anyone to sin (Jas 1:13–15), it is also clear that man's—and Satan's—evil acts are under God's sovereign control (see Ex 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4; Jos 11:20; 1Ki 22:22–23; Job 1:12; 2:10; Eze 3:20; 14:9; Ac 4:28). (CSB)

For reasons known only to God, He allowed Satan to tempt David. Motivated by pride or thirst for power, the king ordered a census of his army. Chem: “God is said to have incited David because it was a punishment for sin” (*LTh* 1:197). (TLSB)

go number Israel and Judah. David's military census (see vv. 2–3) does not appear to have been prompted by any immediate external threat. Since he wanted to “know how many there are” (v. 2), it is evident that his action was motivated either by pride in the size of the empire he had acquired or by reliance for his security on the size of the reserve of manpower he could muster in an emergency or, more likely, both. The mere taking of a census was hardly sinful (see Nu 1:2–3; 26:2–4), but in this instance it represented an unwarranted glorying in and dependence on human power rather than the Lord (not much different from Israel's initial desire to have a king for their security; see 1Sa 8–12). The act was uncharacteristic of David (see 1Sa 17:26, 37, 45–47; 2Sa 22:2–4, 47–51). (CSB)

24:3 *But why ... ?* David's directive does not go unchallenged. The fact that he does not answer suggests that he knew his reasons were highly questionable. In any event, Joab's challenge renders David the more guilty. (CSB)

Joab recognized that David's action could bring guilt on Israel. Cf 1Ch 21:3. (TLSB)

24:5–8 The military census was begun in southern Transjordan and moved northward, then back across the Jordan, moving from north to south. (CSB)

24:6 *Gilead ... Kadesh ... Dan ... Sidon.* Toward Galilee and the coast of the Great Sea. (TLSB)

24:9 *eight hundred thousand ... five hundred thousand.* These figures differ from those of 1Ch 21:5. (CSB)

Some commentators account for the disparity in the totals between 2Sm 24 and 1Ch 21 by suggesting a distinction between fully armed soldiers and all men of military age. When God commanded Moses to conduct a census of the tribes of Israel by their clans and fathers' houses, He established 20 as the age of eligibility for males to enter military service (Nu 1:3). (TLSB)

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." **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."

24:12 *three things I offer.* The three alternative judgments were all included in the curses that Moses said would come on God's people when they failed to adhere to their covenant obligations (see Dt 28:15–25). (CSB)

three days' pestilence in your land? Cf Ex 7–11. Luth: "Frequently an entire nation is punished because of a godless king, just as God also blesses an entire realm because of a pious prince. Thus God prospered all of Syria through Naaman (2Ki 5:1); but because of the sin which David committed He smote the entire people of Israel" (WLS § 2019). (TLSB)

24:14 *not ... into the hands of man.* David, who knew both God and war, knew that even in his anger God is more merciful than man let loose in the rampages of war (see Ps 30:5). (CSB)

24:16 *angel.* Angels appear elsewhere in Scripture as instruments of God's judgment (see Ex 33:2; 2Ki 19:35; Ps 35:5–6; 78:49; Mt 13:41; Ac 12:23). (CSB)

The destroying angel sent by God to carry out the pestilence. (TLSB)

threshing floor of Araunah. Located on Mount Moriah, immediately north of David's city and overlooking it. Later it would become the site of the temple (see 1Ch 22:1; 2Ch 3:1). (CSB)

Called "Ornan" in 1Ch 21:15. Native of Jerusalem (see note, Jsh 15:8), not an Israelite. (TLSB)

24:17 *Let your hand be against me and my father's house.* Although the people of Israel were not without guilt (see v. 1), David assumes full blame for his own act and acknowledges his responsibility as king for the well-being of the Lord's people (see 5:2; 7:7–8). (CSB)

Those who filled positions of leadership over God's chosen people were to serve as shepherds for His people (cf Ezk 34:1–10; Is 44:28). David recognized that, as shepherd of the people of Israel, his guilt resulted in the death of thousands, and he pleaded with the Lord to direct His wrath toward his own family instead. Aph: "All the diligent pastors [shepherds] used thus to give themselves on behalf of their sheep" (*NPNF* 2 13:384). Bern: "Perceiving and lamenting the slaughter of his people, [David] wished to devote himself for them" (*SLSB*, p 73). David's prayer was fulfilled in the Passion of Jesus, the Son of David and our Good Shepherd. (TLSB)

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." 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[g] 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.

24:18 *raise an altar ... on the threshing floor.* Perhaps because God had revealed Himself there through His angel. David was supposed to offer sacrifices there to appease the wrath of the Lord. (TLSB)

24:19 *as the LORD had commanded.* The Lord himself appointed the atoning sacrifice in answer to David's prayer. (CSB)

24:21 *To buy the threshing floor.* David does not simply expropriate the property for his royal purposes (see 1Sa 8:14). (CSB)

24:24 *burnt offerings.* See Lev 1:1–17. (CSB)

David bought the threshing floor. Thus the later site of the temple became the royal property of the house of David. (CSB)

and the oxen. David's haste could not wait for oxen to be brought some distance from his own herds. (CSB)

for a price. Sacrifice had to be costly for David. (TLSB)

24:25 *built there an altar.* This altar was built where Solomon's temple would later be built. Cf 1Ch 22:1. (TLSB)

peace offerings. Reconciliation and restoration of covenant fellowship were obtained by the king's repentance, intercessory prayer and the offering of sacrifices. (CSB)

Ch 24 David's obsession with numbers and statistical strength does not belong in matters of faith. God did not command this census, so He punishes Israel because of it. The temptation to apply worldly strategies in matters of faith is great but should be resisted. Yet, pestilence led to David's repentance, repentance led to sacrifice, and sacrifice led to the temple—the place of God's mercy on earth. Likewise, Christ's cross was a sacrifice to appease God's wrath, which now has resulted in the place of God's mercy on earth: the means of grace in the Holy Christian Church. • “Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o'er us: Have mercy on us, O Jesus!” Amen. (LSB 434:1). (TLSB)