

1 Chronicles

Chapter 21

David's Census Brings Pestilence

Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. 2 So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, "Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number." 3 But Joab said, "May the LORD add to his people a hundred times as many as they are! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?" 4 But the king's word prevailed against Joab. So Joab departed and went throughout all Israel and came back to Jerusalem. 5 And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to David. In all Israel there were 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and in Judah 470,000 who drew the sword. 6 But he did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, for the king's command was abhorrent to Joab. 7 But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel. 8 And 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 acted very foolishly." 9 And the LORD spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, 10 "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.'" 11 So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Choose what you will: 12 either three years of famine, or three months of devastation by your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of the LORD, pestilence on the land, with the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." 13 Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is very great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man." 14 So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. 15 And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16 And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. 17 And David said to God, "Was it not I who gave command to number the people? It is I who have sinned and done great evil. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand, O LORD my God, be against me and against my father's house. But do not let the plague be on your people."

21:1–22:1 Although the story of David's census is quite similar in both narratives, the two accounts function differently. In Samuel the account belongs to the appendix (2Sa 21–24), which begins and ends with accounts of the Lord's anger against Israel during the reign of David because of actions by her kings (in ch. 21, an act of Saul; in ch. 24, an act of David). The Chronicler appears to include it in order to account for the purchase of the ground on which the temple would be built. The additional material in Chronicles that is not found in Samuel (21:28–22:1) makes this interest clear. The census is the preface to David's preparations for the temple (chs. 22–29). (CSB)

21:1 *Satan*. Hbr for "adversary." Found also in Jb 1–2 and Zec 3:1 but with the definite article ("the adversary"). Here it is a proper name. Though 2Sm 24:1 implies that it was the Lord who incited David to take the census, the Chronicler chooses to emphasize the instrument used, i.e., Satan. Chem: "How David fell into such calamitous thinking that he was not willing to follow the counsel of those who gave him good advice is given ... 'Satan moved him' to do this" (*LTh* 1:175). (TLSB)

number Israel. David wished to leave a politically strong nation to Solomon (ch 28). (CSB)

21:3–4 Cf 2Sm 24:3–4. Joab, David’s faithful general, objected to the census. The census itself was not evil, but the motivation for it was wrong. The number of troops does not matter, as later warfare narratives will demonstrate. Only trust in the Lord wins battles. David here demonstrates faith and trust in the size of Israel’s army. (TLSB)

21:4 The Chronicler abridges the more extensive account of Joab’s itinerary found in 2Sa 24:4–8; he does not mention that the census required nine months and 20 days (2Sa 24:8). (CSB)

21:5 *In all Israel ... one million one hundred thousand men ... including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah.* 2Sa 24:9 has 800,000 in Israel and 500,000 (which could be a round number for 470,000) in Judah. The reason for the difference is unclear. Perhaps it is to be related to the unofficial and incomplete nature of the census (see 27:23–24), with the differing figures representing the inclusion or exclusion of certain unspecified groupings among the people (see v. 6). Or perhaps it is simply due to a copyist’s mistake. (CSB)

Description of the process of census taking (2Sm 24:5–8) is not recorded, only the total—1,100,000 troops. (TLSB)

21:6 The Chronicler adds the note that Joab exempted Levi and Benjamin from the counting. This additional note reflects the Chronicler’s concern with the Levites and with the worship of Israel. The tabernacle in Gibeon and the ark in Jerusalem both fell within the borders of Benjamin. (CSB)

Unique to 1Ch. David’s army would have been even larger had Joab counted Levi and Benjamin. (TLSB)

21:7 Famine, enemy destruction, and the sword of the Lord were precisely the punishments decreed for covenant failure in Dt 28:15–68. (TLSB)

21:9 *Gad.* A longtime friend of David, having been with him when he was a fugitive from Saul (1Sa 22:3–5; cf. 1Ch 29:29; 2Ch 29:25). (CSB)

21:10–12 Choices emphasize the seriousness of the offense and challenge David as if to say, “If you’re so clever, choose your own punishment.” (TLSB)

21:13 True to his motive for the census, David expresses fear about his earthly enemies. (TLSB)

21:15–26 Cf 2Sm 24:16b–25. Selection of the temple site. The angel was stopped over a particular spot, the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (Araunah in 2Sm 24:16). This spot was then dedicated for the altar of the Lord. (TLSB)

21:15 *the LORD saw.* Text does not specify what the Lord saw. Perhaps the sight of all the people at Jerusalem moved Him to compassion. (TLSB)

relented. Hbr *nacham*, “regret.” In other usage, this term means “to comfort” (cf Is 40:1–2). (TLSB)

21:16 The verse has no parallel in the traditional Hebrew text of 2Sa 24, so some scholars regard it as an addition by the Chronicler reflecting the more developed doctrine of angels in the postexilic period. However, a fragmentary Hebrew text of Samuel from the third century B.C., discovered at Qumran, contains the verse. It now appears that the Chronicler was carefully copying the Samuel text at his disposal, which differed in some respects from the Masoretic (traditional Hebrew) text. Josephus, who

appears to be following the text of Samuel, also reported this information. Presumably, he too used a text of Samuel similar to that followed by the Chronicler. (CSB)

21:17 *I ... sinned.* Confession of sins affirms David's sincerity. (TLSB)

against my father's house. David's request may have fulfillment in the foolish judgments of his grandson Rehoboam, who caused division in Israel. (TLSB)

David Builds an Altar

18 Now the angel of the LORD had commanded Gad to say to David that David should go up and raise an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. **19** So David went up at Gad's word, which he had spoken in the name of the LORD. **20** Now Ornan was threshing wheat. He turned and saw the angel, and his four sons who were with him hid themselves. **21** As David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David and went out from the threshing floor and paid homage to David with his face to the ground. **22** And David said to Ornan, "Give me the site of the threshing floor that I may build on it an altar to the LORD—give it to me at its full price—that the plague may be averted from the people." **23** Then Ornan said to David, "Take it, and let my lord the king do what seems good to him. See, I give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for the wood and the wheat for a grain offering; I give it all." **24** But King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing." **25** So David paid Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the site. **26** And David built there an altar to the LORD and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering. **27** Then the LORD commanded the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. **28** At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. **29** For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon, **30** but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

21:18 *an altar.* Platform of uncut stones. (TLSB)

21:20–21 The Chronicler reports that Araunah was threshing wheat as the king approached—information not found in 2Sa 24:20. However, Josephus and the fragmentary text of Samuel from Qumran both mention this information. (CSB)

21:20 *saw the angel ... hid.* Appearance of an angel is often fearsome. Cf v 30. (TLSB)

21:25 *six hundred shekels of gold.* 2Sa 24:24 says 50 shekels of silver were paid for the threshing floor and oxen. The difference has been explained by some as the Chronicler's attempt to glorify David and the temple by inflating the price. However, the difference is more likely explained by the Chronicler's statement that this was the price for the "site," i.e., for a much larger area than the threshing floor alone. (CSB)

In 2Sm 24:24, David buys the threshing floor and oxen for 50 shekels of silver. The 1Ch price may be for the entire temple site, while the 2Sm price is only for the threshing floor section and animals. (TLSB)

21:26 *presented ... offerings.* David's role as the one who sacrifices demonstrates again his priestly king identity. (TLSB)

fire from heaven. Underscores the divine approval and the sanctity of the site (see 2Ch 7:1; Lev 9:24; 1Ki 18:37–38). (CSB)

Visible demonstration of divine approval is not mentioned in the parallel account (2Sm 24), but it is in other instances, cf Lv 9:24 (Aaron’s consecration); 1Ki 18:38 (Elijah on Carmel); 2Ch 7:1 (dedication of the temple). *fire.* Lightning. (TLSB)

21:27–22:1 Unique to 1Ch. The Chronicler notes that though David was not the builder of the temple, he is, in fact, responsible for everything about the temple, even its site. (TLSB)

21:28–22:1 This material is not found in 2Sa 24. It reflects the Chronicler’s main concern in reporting this narrative (see note on 21:1–22:1). (CSB)

21:30 *it.* The tabernacle. (CSB)