

## 2 Samuel Chapter 24

Verses 1-17 (see notes on 1 Chronicles 21:1-16).

Verses 1-3: This is not the first time the people of Israel were numbered: Moses did so twice at God's command (in Numbers chapters 1 and 26). But after the people were settled in the Promised Land, we never read again of God requiring a census of Israel.

**2 Samuel 24:1 "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah."**

“Again”: A second outbreak of the divine wrath occurred after the 3 year famine (recorded in 21:1).

The text here says “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them”. While the parallel account (in 1 Chron. 21:1) says: “Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David.” God never does evil or tempts people to do evil (James 1:13-15), but He does use evil agents to accomplish His purposes. In this case, He allowed Satan to incite David to take the census.

“Against Israel”: the inciting of David to conduct a census was a punishment on Israel from the Lord for some unspecified sins. Perhaps sins of pride and ambition had led him to increase the size of this army unnecessarily and place heavy burdens of support on the people. Whatever the sin, it is clear God was dissatisfied with David's motives, goals, and action and brought judgment. David either wanted to glory in the size of his fighting force or take more territory than what the Lord had granted him. He shifted his trust from God to military power (this is a constant theme in the Psalms; 20:7; 25:2; 44:6).

Taking a census was not a wrong thing to do by or in itself. God Himself had previously ordered Moses to make two censuses (Num. 1:2-3; 26:2). However, in this case Satan (1 Chron. 21:1), seized upon the growing pride of David's heart (verses 2-3), to incite him into taking a census, so the king might have a ground of boasting (Dan. 4:30). God, the controller of all things, allowed the deed to be done so as to bring David to a place of humility and reality (verse 10). God and Satan are often involved in the same event, but for a different reason (Job). God so the believer might be instructed and grow, but Satan, to discredit the believer and therefore, God Himself.

It is difficult to understand the meaning of the statement "He moved David". Perhaps this is saying that when the LORD was kindled against Israel, David got angry, and in the heat of the moment ordered the numbering of Israel and Judah. Sometimes we think a suggestion from the devil is a leading of the LORD.

1 Chron. 21:1 "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel."

**2 Samuel 24:2 "For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which [was] with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people."**

“From Dan even to Beer-sheba”: A proverbial statement for all the land of Israel from north to south.

We realize from this, that David is very hasty in having this census taken. Joab is the leader of David's army. David gives him the job of numbering the people. There are several reasons why David might have had this done. One reason would be to see who truly wanted to follow the LORD and who did not. Another reason could have been to see how many men were of the age to go to war. This numbering is for the benefit of David and not a God ordered numbering.

Verses 3-4: Even such a man as “Joab” could see the error in David’s plan and warned him not to go through with it. In the parallel account in 1 Chronicles, Joab refused to number Levi and Benjamin because “the king’s word was abominable to Joab” (1 Chron. 21:6). Every time David stepped out of line, an advisor warned him, as they did every time he ignored the good counsel of others. Leaders must never elevate themselves to the point where they fail to listen to the advice of other people and to be accountable.

**2 Samuel 24:3 "And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, a hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see [it]: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?"**

“But why ... ?” Although Joab protested the plan, he was overruled by David with no reason for the census being stated by David.

The strength of David was not in how many men he could muster out for war. His strength was in the LORD. Joab is opposed to this counting of the people. Joab reminds David that the LORD adds to them, as is needed. They are not in control of how their growth or decline is, so why bother to number the people? Joab is having difficulty in seeing why the king would want such a count.

**2 Samuel 24:4 "Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel."**

Who it seems were of the same mind with Joab, and were against numbering the people, yet their arguments and protests were of no avail with the king. He was determined it should be done, and laid his commands upon them to do it, which they were obliged to comply with.

"And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel. Seeing him resolute and determined, they submitted, took his orders, and set out to do them.

Joab may give advice, but in the end, he must do as king David has commanded him to do. It seems from this, that some of the captains were opposed as well. They, like Joab, had to do as David told them and they went out and counted them.

**2 Samuel 24:5 "And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that [lieth] in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward Jazer:"**

“Aroer”: the census began about 14 miles east of the Dead Sea on the northern bank of the Arnon River, in the southeastern corner of Israel, and continued in a counterclockwise direction through the land.

“Jazer”: A town in the territory of Gad about 6 miles west of Rabbah. Jazer was close to the border of the Ammonite territory.

The people would not like the census, because it usually meant they were facing heavier taxes, or it meant they were counting the men in preparation for a war. Either way, they did not like it. They began on the east side of the Jordan at Aroer in Gad.

**2 Samuel 24:6 "Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi; and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon,"**

“Gilead”: The Transjordan territory north of Gad.

“Dan-jaan”: Either a village near the town of Dan or a fuller name for Dan itself. Dan is 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

**2 Samuel 24:7 "And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, [even] to Beer-sheba."**

“Tyre”: the census takers seem to have gone north from Dan and then west towards Sidon before turning south toward Tyre, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea ruled by David’s friend Hiram (see note on 5:11), but remaining in Israelite territory.

“Beer-sheba”: A major settlement in the south of the land of Israel located about 45 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

**2 Samuel 24:8 "So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days."**

Beginning at the east, and from thence to the north, and then going about to the west, came to the south, which finished their circuit.

They came to Jerusalem, at the end of nine months and twenty days. They were ten days short of ten months in numbering the people; in which they seem to have been very expeditious.

We can see from the details of where and to whom they went, that they covered the entire land. This was a massive job, especially since many of them did not want to be numbered. If this census had been called of God, the Levites would have done it, but this is done by a military king by his captains. This took a long time, as we see by the nine months and twenty days before their return.

**2 Samuel 24:9 "And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah [were] five hundred thousand men."**

“Eight hundred thousand ... five hundred thousand”: (1 Chronicles 21:5), lists the census figure in “Israel” at 1,100,000 and four hundred and seventy thousand” respectfully. A solution can be found in seeing the 1 Chronicles figure including all the available men of military age, whether battle seasoned or not. But the 2 Samuel could be 800,000 battle-seasoned soldiers with the additional 300,000 being of military age who were in reserve but never fought, or it could be the 288,000 in the standing army (1 Chron. 27:1-15), rounded off to 300,000. Either of these two contingents would make up the 1.1 million number of (1 Chron. 21). As far as Judah was concerned, the number (in 2 Samuel is 30,000 more than the 1 Chronicles figure).

First Chronicles makes it clear that the numbering was not completed by Joab, because he didn’t get to the census regarding Benjamin (or Levi), before David came under conviction about completing it all. Joab was glad to stop when he saw the king’s changed heart. Because of the procedure selected (see note on 24:5), the numbering of Benjamin would have been last, so their number was not included. In the record of 2 Samuel the figure for Judah included the already-known number of 30,000 troops from Benjamin, hence the total of 500,000. The Benjamites remained loyal to David and Judah.

This is not the same count that is given in Chronicles. It is interesting that Israel had 800,000 men in all of their tribes, and Judah had 500,000 men by themselves. Whichever account you believe, there were over a million men the age to go to war in all of the tribes of Israel, including Judah.

**2 Samuel 24:10 "And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly."**

“David’s heart smote him”: Although God’s prohibition is not clear in the text, it was clear to David.

“Sinned greatly ... done very foolishly”: David recognized the enormity of his willful rebellion against God. David’s insight saw the seriousness of his error in relying on numerical strength instead of on the Lord, who can deliver by many or few (see 1 Sam. 14:6).

David's heart (conscience), immediately convicted him that he had sinned. David immediately repented, and asked God to take away the iniquity. We do not know exactly what prompted

David to the fact that he had sinned. We do know that his men did not want to do this, and the people did not want it either.

**2 Samuel 24:11 "For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,"**

“Gad” (see note on 1 Sam. 22:5).

Gad was a prophet of David. Gad had access to David at this time, and brings him a message from God.

**2 Samuel 24:12 "Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three [things]; choose thee one of them, that I may [do it] unto thee."**

Not my servant David, as Nathan was bid to say to him when it was in his heart to build a house for him (2 Sam. 7:5); but now he had sinned and displeased the Lord, and therefore it is only plain David.

Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things”: Or lay them before thee to consider of which thou wouldest have done; the Targum is, "one of three things I cast upon thee": As a burden to bear; one of the three I will certainly inflict upon thee by way of chastisement.

"Choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee": Here is mercy mixed with judgment. The Lord is angry, yet shows great condescension and goodness. A sovereign Being, who could have imposed what punishment he pleased, and even all the three mentioned, yet resolves but on one, and leaves that to the option of David.

The statement "Thus saith the LORD" shows that Gad is only the mouthpiece. The message is from God. The LORD sent David a choice of three different punishments for his sin. God will not choose. He will let David choose which one.

Verses 13-15: “Famine”, sword and “plague” often appear as a trio (Jer. 14:12; 18:21; Ezek. 5:17). These three tragedies would kill a similar number of people, but plague would kill them faster than famine or war. God gave David a choice so he would see how serious his sin was and so that he had only himself to blame when the punishment became unbearable.

**2 Samuel 24:13 "So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? Or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me."**

“Famine ... enemies ... pestilence”: David was given a choice of 3 possible punishments for his sin of numbering the people:

(1) 7 years of famine in Israel (see note on 1 Chron. 21:12);

- (2) 3 months of fleeing from his enemies; or
- (3) 3 days of pestilence in the land.

Implicit in the threat of pursuit by “foes” was death by the sword. Famine, sword and plague were Old Testament punishments of the Lord against His sinful people (Lev. 26:23-26; Deut. 28:21-26; Jer. 14:12).

The “seven years” here is probably a miscopy of three years, as read (by the Septuagint and 1 Chron. 21:12).

The punishment had to be public because the sin was public. This is the only place in the Bible where God gives anyone a choice regarding his or her punishment.

This same message in Chronicles speaks of the time of famine as 3 years. Any of these things would be a terrible punishment. David had made such a mistake in hastening to number the people that he would hesitate to make this decision. The prophet would take the message back to the LORD, whatever David decides.

**2 Samuel 24:14 "And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies [are] great: and let me not fall into the hand of man."**

“Fall now into the hand of the Lord”: David knew that the Lord would be more merciful than his enemies, so he took the third option.

David realized that he had sinned and brought this terrible time on himself and his people. He could not bear to make this decision. He knows that God is merciful, so he lets God decide what is right for the punishment. He has placed himself in the hands of God. He does not want to be judged of man.

**2 Samuel 24:15 "So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men."**

The penalty for David’s pride was to have his kingdom reduced by 70,000 people. Because David was the leader of the people, the people of “Israel” had to bear the consequences of his sin, although it is significant that the chapter begins with a reference to God’s anger against Israel in general (24:1).

This does not say that the pestilence lasted 3 days. It says, until the time appointed. Whenever God said it was enough, is when it stopped. Seventy thousand people died. This was as many as would have died in a terrible war. It appears that Jerusalem was spared.

Verses 16 and 25: When God “relented,” He showed that He does divinely respond to human action: He averted the plague as a result of David’s plea for Israel. This is not to say that God

changed His mind or did not plan ahead of time when the plague would end, but it does say that God's character is to be responsive to His people.

**2 Samuel 24:16 "And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing place of Araunah the Jebusite."**

“Repented”: An expression of God's deep sorrow concerning man's sin and evil (see 1 Sam. 15:11, 29).

“Araunah the Jebusite”: Araunah (or Ornan) was a pre-Israelite inhabitant of Jerusalem. He owned a threshing floor north of the citadel of Jerusalem and outside its fortified area.

For the repentance of God (see the note on 1 Samuel 15:11).

This reminds us of the angel that brought death to the firstborn of Egypt. The LORD was overseeing all this. When the angel started to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD stopped him. This angel was stationed outside Jerusalem by the threshing floor of Araunah.

**2 Samuel 24:17 "And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house."**

“Let thine hand ... be against me”: Rather than witness the further destruction of his people, David called down the wrath upon himself and his own family (Exodus 32:32).

“David offered to bear the punishment for his own sin, just as his descendant the Messiah would one day do. His willingness to bear this punishment reveals how much David cared for his people. In the beginning, the people are portrayed foremost as his subjects, among whom were “valiant men” who could serve in his army (24:8-9). Yet when the people began to suffer for his sin, David tenderly refers to them as his “sheep” (24:17). This shepherd-like concern reflects the character of his descendant and the ultimate heir to his throne, Jesus Christ (John 10:11-15).

God's chastening had achieved its desired effect. “David” recognizes that as the king of Israel his primary task was that of a shepherd with his “sheep.” He manfully and humbly repents of his sin and pleads for this beloved “people.” Despite his oft-besetting sins, David had a tender heart toward God and God's people. Accordingly, David is commended as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam. 13:14; 1 Kings 3:14; 9:4; 11:4, 6, 33, 38, 14:8, 15:3).

In Chronicles, it says that David saw an angel between heaven and earth with a drawn sword. He speaks to the LORD on behalf of the people. David takes full blame for the numbering. He says he has sinned and deserves to be punished. Let the punishment come on him and his house. The sheep here are speaking of the people. David is taking too much of the blame, because it was the people, who had angered God and caused this. They wanted war.

Verses 18-25: God redeemed David's sin by commissioning him to buy the site where the temple would one day be built (1 Chron. 22:1). David had sinned and many people died as a result of his sin, but God turned the situation into a new beginning, the place where His presence would dwell with His people (see 1 Chronicles 21:18-27).

**2 Samuel 24:18 "And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."**

"Altar": At this time, the altar associated with the tabernacle of Moses was located at Gibeon (1 Chron. 21:29; 2 Chron. 1:2-6). David was instructed by Gad to build another altar to the Lord at the place where the plague had stopped. This indicated where the Lord's choice was for the building of His temple.

**2 Samuel 24:19 "And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded."**

From the place where he was in a lower part of the city to Mount Moriah, on which was the threshing floor, a place fit for winnowing corn when threshed.

This time David immediately obeys the message that Gad brought him from the LORD. He goes to the threshing floor to build the altar to God.

**2 Samuel 24:20 "And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground."**

Peeped up out of the place in which he had hid himself with his four sons, for fear of the angel, and which they saw (1 Chron. 21:20).

"And saw the king and his servants coming towards him": He perceived, by the course they steered, that they were coming to him.

"And Araunah went out": Of the threshing floor, out of the place where he had hidden himself, for he had been threshing wheat (1 Chron. 21:20). Nor was it thought below great personages in those times to be employed in such work. So, Gideon was threshing, when the angel of the Lord appeared to him (Judges 6:11); Boaz winnowed barley in his threshing floor (Ruth 3:2).

"And bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground": In reverence of the king.

Araunah owned the threshing floor. When he saw David and his servants, he was probably terrified. He immediately bowed to the king not knowing what he might want.



**2 Samuel 24:21 "And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshing floor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people."**

Which both implies admiration in him; that so great a person should visit him in his threshing floor, or that a king should come to a subject his servant, who should rather have come to him, and would upon the least intimation. It was a piece of condescension he marveled at; and it expresses a desire to know his pleasure with him, supposing it must be something very urgent and important, that the king should come himself upon it. And to this David answered.

"And David said, what he was come for": To buy the threshing floor from thee, to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people. For though David had acknowledged his sin, and God had repented of the evil he inflicted for it, and given orders for stopping it. Yet he would have an altar built, and sacrifices offered, to show that the only way to have peace, and pardon, and safety from ruin and destruction deserved by sin, is through the expiatory (canceling of sin), sacrifice of Christ. Of which these sacrifices were typical, and were designed to lead the faith of the Lord's people to that.

This was probably a great surprise to Araunah. David explains exactly why he wants to buy the threshing floor, so there will be no delay.

**2 Samuel 24:22 "And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what [seemeth] good unto him: behold, [here be] oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and [other] instruments of the oxen for wood."**

Build an altar, offer sacrifices of whatsoever he found upon the premises fit for the same, and make use of whatever came to hand proper to perform such service with, as follows.

"Behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice": Which were employed in treading the corn, hence the law (in Deuteronomy 25:4).

"And threshing instruments": Not flails, such as are used by us, but wooden sledges, drays or carts drawn on wheels, which were filled with stones, and the bottom of them stuck with iron teeth, and were drawn by oxen to and fro over the sheaves of corn (see Isaiah 28:27).

"And other instruments of the oxen for wood": As their yokes; these Araunah gave leave to take to burn the sacrifice with (and in 1 Chron. 21:23 it is added), "and the wheat for the meat offering", which was upon the threshing floor; and there always went a meat offering with a burnt offering.

**2 Samuel 24:23 "All these [things] did Araunah, [as] a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee."**

The note of similitude as is not in the text; from whence some have thought he was king of the Jebusites before Jerusalem was taken out of their hands, or however was of the royal race, perhaps the son and heir of the then king at that time. Or he has this title given him, because of

his great liberality, having the spirit of a prince in him, even of a king. So, Ulysses addressed Antinous, saying, thou art like a king, and therefore should give more largely than others.

"And Araunah said unto the king, the Lord thy God accept thee": Thine offering with a good will; with pleasure and delight, as the Targum; that so the plague might be removed, and which no doubt made him the more ready to part with the above things, and all that he had. So dreadful did the calamity appear to him, and especially after he saw the angel with his drawn sword just over him.

Araunah did not want money for the threshing floor. He offered to let David use it, and even offered animals to be sacrificed. He would give David whatever was needed.

**2 Samuel 24:24 "And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy [it] of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver."**

The apparent discrepancy between the "fifty shekels" paid to "Araunah" mentioned here and the six hundred recorded by the author of Chronicles (1 Chron. 21:25), probably has to do with the differences in the amount of land purchased as indicated in the two accounts. Samuel speaks of the "threshing floor" as a site for the housing of the Ark. Chronicles mentions the whole territory including the threshing floor; hence the price is much larger. The bigger area will be the location of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:1-2; 2 Chron. 3:1-4). Since the account in Chronicles is introductory to "David's" preparations for the building of the temple, it served the purposes of the author of Chronicles to mention the purchase of the whole site. The account in Samuel, however, is more limited in scope, being concerned with the "offerings" necessary to stay the plague (verses 21, 25).

Abraham went to the "land of Moriah" when he offered his son Isaac (Gen. 22:2). The author of Chronicles (2 Chron. 3:1), associates Mount Moriah with the threshing floor of Araunah (Ornan, 1 Chron. 21:18).

"Cost me nothing": Sacrifice is an essential part of worship and service to God (see Mal. 1:6-10; 2 Cor. 8:1-5).

"Fifty shekels": A little more than a pound of silver. (1 Chronicles 21:25), says David paid 600 shekels of gold. How is this discrepancy resolved? In the initial transaction, David either bought or leased the small threshing floor (usually 30 to 40 square feet), and purchased the oxen. Fifty shekels of silver is appropriate. After that (1 Chron. 21:25), says he bought "the site," costing 180 times as much, and referring to the entire area of Mt. Moriah.

David would not bargain, but would not use anything that had not cost him something. It would not be a sacrifice, unless David paid for it. Silver is symbolic of redemption and fifty is the number of Jubilee, when the captives are set free. This may not be significant, but is an interesting thought.

**2 Samuel 24:25 "And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."**

“The plague was stayed”: This indicates that judgment is not the final action of the Lord toward either Israel or the house of David. God will fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants (Ezekiel Chapter 37).

David obeyed the instructions of God sent to him by the prophet Gad. David immediately paid for what he took and built the altar, and sacrificed thereon. This does not mean that David did the actual work of the priest. He offered the things in the usual manner for a burnt offering and a peace offering. God stayed the plague.

We may look at this and see a terrible slaughter. Had not God allowed this to happen, the people could have slipped into more sin and everyone would have been killed. God is always ready to reconcile with his people, if they will repent and return to worshipping Him.

## **2 Samuel Chapter 24 Questions**

1. The anger of the LORD was kindled against \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Who did David send to take the census?
3. What are some of the possible reasons, why David wanted the people numbered?
4. Who tried to talk David out of this?
5. Where did David's strength lie?
6. Who prevailed, Joab, or David?
7. Who went with Joab to count the people?
8. Where did they begin?
9. Why did the people not want to be counted?
10. How long did it take to number the people?
11. How many people did they count?
12. What happened to David, after the numbering was over?
13. What did he do about it?
14. Who was the prophet that brought God's message to David?

15. How many choices of punishments did David have?
16. What were the things David had to choose from?
17. What did David choose?
18. What did the LORD do to them?
19. How many died?
20. What city was spared?
21. When did David speak to the LORD about this?
22. Who are the sheep spoken of in verse 17?
23. What did Gad tell David to do, to stop the plague?
24. Where was the altar to be built?
25. What did Araunah offer to do for David?
26. Why would David not do that?
27. How much did David pay for the threshing floor?
28. What did they offer at the altar?
29. What did God do, after the offerings?