

STUDIES IN SAMUEL

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 24

- Vv. 1- 9 *The numbering.* David conceived the plan of going throughout the length and breadth of Israel and numbering his people. Joab opposed this, but David went ahead with the project.
- Vv. 10-15 *The plague.* David was given a choice of three penalties for his rash actions. He chose the one which he thought would make him most dependent upon the mercy of God. The plague swept over Israel, but was stayed when it spread to Jerusalem.
- Vv. 16-25 *The plague stayed...* When the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem, the Lord said, "It is enough" (v. 16). David then went out to offer sacrifice to the Lord. He built an altar on the mountain immediately east of his capital.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. "*Pride goeth before destruction*" (Proverbs 16:18). There is nothing wrong in numbering a people. God commanded his people to be numbered twice while they were wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 1 and 26). David evidently numbered his people in order to revel in his strength. It is wrong to take pride in one's own physical accomplishments and power. For this reason he was punished.
2. "*If any is to glory, let him glory in the Lord*" (I Corinthians 1:31). Sacrifices to God are not to be free (v. 24). Araunah offered to give David the threshing floor and the oxen for his sacrifice. David refused saying that he would not offer something to God which had cost him nothing. What we give to God ought

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to represent a sacrifice. It should come from the labors of our hands and represent the best that we have to offer to God. God was entreated for the land in the days of David by his sacrificial offering, and God will be pleased by the sacrificial efforts of Christians in every age.

5. The Sin of Census, 24:1-25.

The Numbering. 24:1-9

And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

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.

3 And Joab said unto the king, Now the Lord thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundred-fold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see *it*: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?

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.

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:

6 Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tah-tim-hodshi; and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon,

7 And came to the stronghold 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.

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 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.

1. *When did the numbering occur? 24:1*

There is no indication of the exact time of the numbering of Israel which provoked the anger of the Lord, but certain indications in the text point to a date late in the reign of David. First of all, we read that "*again* the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." This sounds very definitely like a reference to the famine which came in the days of David three years in a row when the Gibeonites called for vengeance (II Samuel 21:1). Since the anger of the Lord was kindled again, this numbering occurred after the famine. In the second place, the numbering took nearly ten months of time, and it would be very difficult for the commander-in-chief of the army to spend this length of time in what would be a peacetime task until after the conquests which marked the beginning of David's reign had been completed. In the third place, the description of David's preparation for building the temple which occupied the latter part of his reign is given in the book of Chronicles immediately after the account of this numbering. The numbering itself must have been one of David's last acts.

2. *Did God move David to make the census? 24:1 b*

The subject of the verb "moved" in this verse is the Lord whose anger was kindled against Israel. The nation had sinned against God and incurred His anger, and He moved David to perform an act which brought down a severe punishment on the nation. God did not compel David to sin; but in order to test and prove his character, he allowed the temptation to come to him. Although we read in James 1:13 that no man is tempted of God, we are also instructed to pray that God should not bring us

into temptation (Matthews 6:13). In I Chronicles 22:1 the statement is made that Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number his people. Such a condition would be similar to that of the days of Job when God allowed Satan to afflict a righteous man (Job 1:12; 2:10).

3. Why did David want to number his people? 24:2

David said that he wanted to know the number of his people, but he was hardly so childish that he wanted to know the number simply for the sake of the knowledge. He had an end in mind which made the numbering wrong. The mere taking of a census was not wrong in itself, for God had commanded the numbering of His people on two separate occasions as they wandered in the wilderness (Numbers 1:26). On other occasions, the number of people who went out to war was given indicating there must have been a consciousness of numbers and a means for ascertaining the exact numbers (I Samuel 11:8; 13:2).

4. Why did Joab oppose the numbering? 24:3

Joab was not a man moved by religious scruples, and his opposition must have been based on some other reason. He would have to leave the work that he was best fitted for, and this may have been the basis of his objection. Later events proved that it was wrong, and Joab may have been able to ascertain this better than the king himself. Since he was not moved by religious scruples and his selfishness did not always cause him to do his work, his strong objection to the numbering of the people arose from his perception of David's motives.

5. What was wrong with David's actions?

David overruled Joab's objections and sent him out to number the people of Israel. Something was dreadfully wrong with David's actions. The numbering was presented in verse one as the manifestation of the wrath of God against Israel, and in verse three Joab tried to stop the king from continuing. In verse ten, David himself admitted that it was a grievous sin against God. His "heart

smote him." Moreover, as a sin, the numbering of the people was punished by the Lord (verse 12). Josephus indicated that the census was a sin because he neglected to demand the atonement money which was specified in the law (Exodus 30:12 ff.). Such could hardly be the case because the collecting of the atonement money mentioned in the book of Exodus was the original enrolling of the people as members of the commonwealth of Israel. Many students of the Scripture have suggested that David entered into the whole affair with pride and vain boasting and that he commanded the census out of his vanity. But David was hardly so vain as to desire simply to have the number which he could quote or which could be recorded in the annals and provide him with an opportunity for reviewing how mighty he was. This may have entered into the sin, since Joab prayed that God multiply the number by 100 and allow the eyes of the king to see it. A higher purpose for the census was suggested in I Chronicles 27:23, 24, where the numbering was connected with the military organization of the kingdom. David must not have taken the census in order to boast nor in order to levy taxes. He must have desired to be fully acquainted with his defensive power and thus came to a place where he was trusting his own might and not leaning heavily on the strength of God, although we cannot be justified in concluding that he was intending to enter into a campaign of world-wide conquests in an effort to make him more of a world power. God reduced the number to show that any effort of feeble man alone can be brought to nought by an almighty God.

6. *What was the route of the enumerators? 24:5-7*

Those who took the census went out from Jerusalem and crossed over Jordan. They set up their headquarters in Aroer, a spot on the north bank of the Arnon river ten miles east of the Dead Sea. It was the southernmost town of Israel east of the Jordan and has been referred to as

“the Beersheba of the East.” From this point, the workers moved north into the territory of Gad, the tribe which settled in the center section of the land east of the Jordan (Numbers 32:33-42). Jazer was a town taken by Israel from the Amorites (Numbers 21:32) and assigned to the tribe of Gad (Numbers 32:1-3, 35). The city was named a Levitical city (Joshua 21:39). The importance of the town is seen in the fact that it gave its name to the district including some dependent towns (Numbers 31:32), and both Isaiah and Jeremiah mentioned the place in their prophecies (Isaiah 16:8, 9 and Jeremiah 48:32). It has been identified with Khirbet-jazzier. The men then turned north through Gilead and went throughout the land to a point mentioned only here in the Scriptures; the name of Tahtimhodshi means the “lowland recently occupied” and is probably a reference to the edge of the Israelite territory. Everybody was counted including those in Dan-Jaan, Israel’s northernmost town. David’s servants then moved west to the Phoenician territory on the Mediterranean sea-coast counting people all the way to Tyre, the capital city of Phoenicia. They moved down through western Palestine taking the census in the cities which had once belonged to the Canaanites until they reached Israel’s southernmost town, Beersheba. When the entire count had been made, they brought their report up to the king at Jerusalem. The total time spent in taking the census was nine months and twenty days (verse 8).

7. *What was the total of the number of the people? 24:9*

Joab and his men had counted 800,000 men in the ten tribes of Israel. There were 500,000 men in the tribe of Judah. Inasmuch as men were counted only after they had reached their twentieth birthday, this would be 1,300,000 men twenty years of age and over, thus men able to go to war (Numbers 1:3). There must have been an equal number of men under twenty years of age, making the total of 2,600,000 males. An equal number of females

should be added to bring the grand total to 5,200,000 or 6,000,000 people. The number is larger in Chronicles (I Chronicles 21:5), and an additional note is made that the men of the tribes of Levi and Benjamin were not counted (I Chronicles 21:6). The smaller number in the book of Samuel must be without the two tribes mentioned, and the number in Chronicles probably included them. The number in Chronicles is given in connection with David organizing his kingdom, and the tribe of Benjamin is mentioned in the list of tribes and their chieftains (I Chronicles 27:21). An additional note is made in the book of Chronicles stating that the count was not the official count (I Chronicles 27:24). Critics take particular exception to the numbers found in Chronicles as compared to those found in the books of Samuel and Kings. Certainly the writer of Chronicles did not deliberately seek to make his work appear ridiculous by increasing the numbers in the Chronicles, although the radical critics generally charge that the numbers are exaggerated in Chronicles. Neither did the writer give numbers out of ignorance, for the work is too superb for such a thing to be possible. It must be noted that the numbers given are round numbers, representing only approximate figures. Only thousands are taken into account, and the intention apparently is merely to indicate the greatness of the armies. While the numbers in Chronicles are usually larger than those in Samuel or Kings, sometimes they are smaller. For example, 40,000 stalls for Solomon's horses are mentioned in I Kings 4:26, but II Chronicles 9:25 gives 4,000. In I Chronicles 11:11, three hundred mighty men are mentioned, but eight hundred are given in II Samuel 23:8. In I Chronicles 21:12 David was given a choice of three years of famine, whereas the number is seven years in II Samuel 24:13. In all of these cases the numbers are smaller in Chronicles than in the parallel passages in Kings or Samuel. Lastly, we must

remember that even though today we are not in a position to explain precisely and to our satisfaction how the differences in the numerals may have arisen, these numerals being so isolated must not shake the conviction we have in the general historical credibility of Chronicles. Many more passages are in accordance with the facts as found elsewhere, and these are sufficient to give the earmarks of historicity and trustworthiness to the scriptures of Chronicles.

The Plague. 24:10-15

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.

11 For when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

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.

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.

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.

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.

8. How did David know he had sinned? 24:10

David's heart smote him after he had completed the numbering of the people. He calmly reflected upon the matter and came to see the folly of his intentions. If he had acted because the people themselves had sinned and thus brought down upon themselves the wrath of God, he knew that it was wrong to react against their evil by performing an evil himself. Two wrongs never make a right. If the people had done something wrong, David should have done something good to counteract it. David also knew that Joab had opposed this numbering, and he came to see that Joab was right. His conviction was confirmed in the morning when Gad, the prophet, brought the judgment of God to him.

9. Who was the prophet Gad? 24:11

Gad had first come to David when David fled from Saul (I Samuel 22:5). His ministry at that time was to encourage David while he was a fugitive. He particularly brought God's message to the effect that David was to stay in the borders of Israel while fleeing from Saul. He was not to seek refuge in Moab or any other place outside the land of his forefathers. Although it was Nathan who brought him the message of the great covenant (II Samuel 7), Gad must have been a constant companion to David. He was one of the three men who wrote the entire history of David (I Chronicles 29:29). His message following the numbering was one giving David a choice of three penalties—famine, flight, or pestilence.

10. Why did David choose the pestilence? 24:14

David felt that he would be more dependent upon the mercy of God if a pestilence was sent upon Israel. It was to be a pestilence lasting for three days, but its toll was heavy. Had the Israelites suffered seven years of famine, the land would have been brought to its knees in hunger. Her enemies would have been able to attack her and overcome her. In that way, Israel would have been

at the mercy of hostile men. The same would have been true if they were forced to flee for three months. The toll would have been extremely heavy in such circumstances, and they would have been subjected to all the acts of reprisal which enemy nations could devise.

11. What was the effect of the pestilence? 24:15

God sent a pestilence on Israel which afflicted them all day long. Seventy thousand of Israel's men who had recently been counted in the myriads of Israel were smitten before God. The great number in which David had taken pride was thus reduced with one fell swoop from the hand of God. David learned a lesson that could be learned in no other way. He saw that man at his best is helpless before God.

The Plague Stayed. 24:16-25

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.

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.

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.

19 And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

25 And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings. So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

12. *Where was the threshing floor of Araunah? 24:16*

The plague began on the morning of its announcement by the prophet Gad and continued through that day. Some commentators have presented the thought that the plague continued till the expiration of the three days, and the Vulgate translation supports this interpretation. But the plague was stopped earlier than originally intended because God's mercy was poured out upon the people. The pestilence must have lasted to the appointed time for evening prayers, which would be the ninth hour of the day or the third hour of the afternoon. Although the pestilence did not last for the three days announced, the toll exceeded considerably the number destroyed by the most violent pestilences on record. Jerusalem itself was spared when God stayed the hand of the angel of the Lord, who must have been distinctly visible to the people.

His visible appearance is described more minutely in the book of Chronicles, and David saw him standing by the threshing floor of Araunah between heaven and earth with a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem (I Chronicles 21:15, 16). The threshing floor of Araunah was situated outside the city of Jerusalem on Mt. Moriah, a hill to the northeast of mount Zion. It was here that the temple was built later in the days of Solomon.

13. What was David's offer to God? 24:17

David stands in the company of the great intercessors of the Bible. He took the same attitude as that taken by Moses when he offered to have his name blotted out of the book of life in order that the people of Israel might be spared (Exodus 32:32). This was the same compassion as that demonstrated by the apostle Paul, who said he could wish himself to be anathema in order that his people Israel could be saved (Romans 9:3). David said that he was the one who had sinned against God and brought pestilence upon Israel. He prayed that the people of Israel might be spared because they were like sheep without a shepherd and were not responsible for what had happened. He asked that he himself and his father's people might be punished for what he had done, but he asked for God to be merciful to the thousands of Israel.

14. What did Gad tell David to do? 24:18

Gad instructed David to go up to the mountain where he had seen the angel of the Lord and build an altar to God in the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite. Araunah is called a Jebusite because he was not a member of the commonwealth of Israel, but a Canaanite man. His name is not a typical Hebrew name and substantiates the statement that he was a Jebusite.

15. Why did Araunah offer to give David the threshing floor? 24:20

Araunah saw David coming and went out to meet his king. He asked what brought him to his threshing floor,

and David told him that he had come to buy the floor in order to build an altar to the Lord and remove the plague from the people. In typical Canaanite fashion, Araunah offered to give him the threshing floor, the machinery for wood for a fire, and the oxen for an offering. Ephron, the Hittite, had made this same kind of offer to Abraham when Abraham wanted to buy the cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah. On that occasion, the Hittite named his price as he and Abraham continued to discuss the matter (Genesis 23:15). Araunah wanted to have part in the sacrifice which David intended to make, and he offered the needed provisions to the king.

16. Why did David refuse the offer? 24:24

David did not want to offer something to God which had cost him nothing. Had David taken the material from Araunah, the sacrifice would not have been David's but Araunah's. His spirit is an ideal for the spirit of a Christian. Christians should not give something to God which has meant nothing to them. If they enter into this kind of practice, the offering will mean nothing to God. God expects man to give of the best to Him.

17. What later use was made of the area? 24:25

Additional notes were given in the book of Chronicles, where it was noted that when David built the altar and offered the burnt offerings and peace offerings as he called upon the name of the Lord, God answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering (I Chronicles 21:26). There it was stated that the Lord also commanded the angel to put up his sword again into the sheath, and the pestilence ceased. David continued to offer sacrifice upon the altar built on the threshing floor of Araunah and designated the spot at the site of the temple which was afterwards to be built (II Chronicles 22:1). The Chronicler also appended an account of the preparations which David made for building the temple (I Chronicles 22:2 ff.).

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CHAPTER 24 IN REVIEW

1. What action did David take which angered God? _____
2. Whom did David appoint to do the work? _____
3. Where was the numbering begun? _____
4. How long did the census take? _____
5. How many men were in Judah? _____
6. How many men were in the rest of Israel? _____
7. What prophet told David he had sinned? _____
8. From what three penalties could David choose?

9. Which one did he choose? _____
10. From whom did David buy a threshing floor? _____