

The Judgment of God For Wars of Aggression - David's Numbering of the People (2Sa 24 & 1Ch 21)

- I. An examination of the account of David numbering Israel is necessary and profitable for the following reasons:
 1. It shows us the serious nature of the crime of aggression and God's severe punishment of it.
 2. It shows us that even a man after God's own heart can commit heinous sins.
 3. It is useful in learning how to reconcile alleged contradictions in the Bible, of which there are four in this account.

- II. God was angry again with Israel and He allowed Satan to move David to number the people (**2Sa 24:1 c/w 1Ch 21:1**).
 1. **1Sa 24:1** says that *God* moved David to number Israel.
 2. **1Ch 21:1** says that *Satan* provoked David to number Israel.
 3. This alleged contradiction is easily explained by the fact that God sometimes does things by permitting Satan to do them (**Job 1:9-12 c/w Job 1:21; Job 2:4-10**).
 4. The Lord will use lying spirits to deceive people into doing what they want to do (**1Ki 22:20-23**).
 5. God was not tempting David to sin (**Jam 1:13**); God permitted the devil to tempt David to sin.
 6. David was a man after God's own heart (**Act 13:22**).
 - A. Nevertheless God allowed Satan to provoke David to commit a great sin.
 - B. We that stand should take heed lest we fall (**1Co 10:12**).

- III. David ordered Joab to number the people (**2Sa 24:2**).
 1. Numbering the people was a precursor to war (**Num 1:22; Jos 8:10-11; 1Sa 15:3-5; 2Ki 3:6-7; 2Sa 18:1; 1Ki 20:13-15**).
 - A. It is quite possible that David had plans for war and conquest that God did not command nor ordain.
 - i. "The act of numbering the people was not in itself sinful; for Moses did it by the express authority of God. But David acted not only independently of such order or sanction, but from motives unworthy of the delegated king of Israel; from pride and vainglory; from self-confidence and distrust of God; and, above all, from ambitious designs of conquest, in furtherance of which he was determined to force the people into military service, and to ascertain whether he could muster an army sufficient for the magnitude of the enterprises he contemplated. It was a breach of the constitution, an infringement of the liberties of the people, and opposed to that divine policy which required that Israel should continue a separate people. His eyes were not opened to the heinousness of his sin till God had spoken unto him by His commissioned prophet." (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, commenting on 2Sa 24:10-13)
 - ii. "It was a proud confidence in his own strength. By publishing among the nations the number of his people, he thought to appear the more formidable, and doubted not that, if he should have any war, he should overpower his enemies with the multitude of his forces, trusting in God only. God judges

not of sin as we do. What appears to us harmless, or at least but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who sees men's principles, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth." (Matthew Henry's Commentary, commenting on 2Sa 24:1-9)

- B. David was not looking for the number of all the inhabitants of Israel, but for the number of military-aged men (**2Sa 24:9**).
 - i. David was putting his confidence in the military.
 - ii. We are not to trust in the military, but rather in God (**Pro 21:31; Psa 20:7; Psa 33:16-19; Psa 44:6; Isa 31:1**).
- C. It is unlikely that David wanted to know the number of soldiers for mere curiosity, given the severity of the punishment that God inflicted on the nation for this act.
 - i. The Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel that killed 70,000 men (**2Sa 24:15**).
 - ii. This was the greatest number of Israelites that God ever killed as a punishment against them.
- D. If David indeed was numbering the people in preparation for an unjust war of aggression, then the severe punishment seems more appropriate.
 - i. God judged Babylon for its imperialistic wars of aggression (**Hab 1:6 c/w Hab 2:5-13**).
 - ii. God judged Assyria for its wars of aggression after He used them to punish His people, Israel (**Isa 10:5-7, 12-13**).
- E. The nation was being judged and punished for the actions of their leader.
 - i. The angel of the Lord was about ready to destroy Jerusalem when the Lord stopped him (**2Sa 24:15-16**).
 - ii. How long will it be until the LORD sends the angel of death to severely judge the United States of America for its wars of aggression that have killed untold millions of people who have posed no threat to us (The Confederate States of America, Cuba, the Philippines, Germany in WWI, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, Syria, etc.)?
 - iii. If we had our eyes opened like David did, would we see the angel of the Lord with his hand stretched out over America ready to destroy it?
- F. Israel's punishment came *after* their king realized his sin and repented (**2Sa 24:10-15**).
 - i. How much sorer punishment do we deserve when our kings not only obstinately refuse to acknowledge their sins of mass-murder, but even pardon their predecessors after they are out of office as President Obama did for George Bush and Dick Cheney and as President Trump did for Obama?
 - ii. Those that harden their necks after being often reproved will be suddenly destroyed without remedy (**Pro 29:1**).

IV. "Contradictions" in this account

1. **2Sa 24:9 c/w 1Ch 21:5** - 800,000 or 1,100,000 Israelites? 470,000 or 500,000 men of Judah?

- A. Peter Ruckman has an explanation for the discrepancy between **2Sa 24:9** and **1Ch 21:5**.

- i. "Israel's force is given as 800,000 in one place, but 1,100,000 in another. Judah has been given as 500,000 in one place, 470,000 in the other. Obviously--if you lack belief, faith, intelligence, common sense, and interest--there is a "contradiction."

"We are not being facetious. If a man had *belief and faith* he would never have questioned the census to start with. If he had *real interest* he would have investigated cross references before saying blithely "there is a mistake in copying" or "it was a scribal error." If he had had *intelligence* he would have known that the "chosen men of Israel" (2Sam. 6:1) would not include recruits or draftees, and if he had any *common sense* to start with he would have noticed that the differences are so balanced (30,000 for two tribes-- Benjamin and Judah, to 300,000 for the other ten tribes) that it was as plain as the nose on his face that 800,000 are ready for combat (on active duty) in Israel and 470,000 are ready for combat in the two southern tribes. The northern tribes have 300,000 on *inactive duty* and the southern tribes have 30,000 on *inactive duty*. (Or, for that matter, if a man had had a little experience in the service, wouldn't he know that hundreds of men serve in the cooks and bakers school, the quartermasters corps, the ordinance depots, the motor pools, and the hospitals, who are NOT active combatants?)" (Peter S. Ruckman, *Problem Texts*, p.180-181)

B. John Gill has another possible explanation for it.

- i. "In 1Ch 21:5, they are said to be a million and an hundred thousand, which is three hundred thousand more than the sum here given; several methods are taken to reconcile this; but what seems to be the best solution of the difficulty is what is observed by a Jew, that here the number of the people in the several parts of the land of Israel was given, which were eight hundred thousand, there along with them, the numbers of the standing army which waited on the king in their courses, which were twenty four thousand every month, and amounted in the twelve months to 288,000, and reckoning lo thousand officers to them, they make the sum of three hundred thousand wanted, see 1Ch 27:1, &c." (John Gill commenting on 2Sa 24:9)
- ii. "In 1Ch 21:5, they are said to be only 470,000, thirty thousand less than here; which may be accounted for by making use of a round number, though something wanting, as is often done; or else the thirty companies, consisting of a thousand each, under the eighty captains mentioned in 2Sa 23:8, are taken into the account here, but left out in the book of Chronicles; or there were so many in the sum total of the men of Judah before the plague, but thirty thousand being consumed thereby, are left out in the latter accounts, so Kimchi; but the other solutions seem best: Levi and Benjamin were not counted; it being abominable to Joab, he did not finish it, and especially being displeasing to God, who smote Israel for it, 1Ch 21:6." (John Gill commenting on 2Sa 24:9)

2. **2Sa 24:13 c/w 1Ch 21:12** - Seven or three years famine?

- A. In **2Sa 24:13**, the Lord gives David the option of seven years of famine, but in **1Ch 21:12** it is recorded as three years of famine.
 - B. Skeptics cry "contradiction!"
 - C. Bible believers with faith and brains know there is no contradiction here.
 - i. There had already been a famine in the land for three years prior to David numbering the people (**2Sa 21:1**).
 - ii. It took nearly 10 months for Joab to number the people (**2Sa 24:8**).
 - iii. This makes three years and 10 months of famine at the time that God said that David would have three more years of famine (**1Ch 21:12**), for a total of six years and ten months, or seven years if rounded up (**2Sa 24:13**).
 - D. Wisdom is justified of her children (**Luk 7:35**).
3. **2Sa 24:24 c/w 1Ch 21:25** - 50 shekels of silver or 600 shekels of gold?
- A. "The problem is simpler than the previous one. One price is for the "**place**," the other is only for the threshing floor and the oxen." (Peter S. Ruckman, *Problem Texts*, p.181)
 - B. "...the other is, that there were two purchases, the first was of the threshing floor, oxen, and instruments, which were bought for fifty shekels of silver, as here, and the other was a purchase of the place, as it is called in the book of Chronicles; that large space of ground on which afterwards the temple, and all the courts adjoining to it, were built, and which was now Araunah's farm, and on which were his dwelling house, and other buildings; and for all this David gave him six hundred shekels of gold, which made three hundred ounces and reckoning gold as twelve times the value of silver, according to Brerewood, it amounted to four hundred fifty pounds of our money; and learned men have not been able to give a better solution of this difficulty; and with this Montanus agrees." (John Gill, commenting on 2Sa 24:24)