

# THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding the Bible's story, Jesus' importance, & our place in God's kingdom plan



Lesson 100: David Sins Again, but God is Merciful  
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## Philistine Wars... Again & More Giants

### 2 Samuel 21:15-22

If these events take place chronologically after the previous chapters, then these are battles which occurred after David reclaimed the throne again. David's sin caused conflict even within his family. After his son Absalom tried to overthrow him, David had to reclaim the throne and bring stability once again in Israel and Judah.

These events may show us how even though David had the throne again, he did not have peace like he did before his sin with Bathsheba. This section covers how the Philistines waged war again with Israel. They launched multiple attacks in different places, sometimes the same place more than once.

In one battle with them, David goes out to battle. However, David is older now and this time it says he becomes weary in battle. One of Goliath's descendants sought to kill David. He was also of great stature. Abishai (brother of Joab) assisted David in killing him. However, David's army officers tell him that from now on, David is to remain off the battlefield. If he dies in battle, then Israel will lose its glory and stability they say. This is another narrative marker that David is nearing the end of his life. His warrior days have come to an end.

The Philistines waged war at Gob, more than once. Goliath's brother was killed in this battle. Then, the Philistines attacked at Gath. One of Goliath's sons was there. It says he had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. David's nephew, Jonathan, killed him. Four of the giants born from Goliath were all killed by David and his forces.

## David's Life Nears the End

### 2 Samuel 22 & 23

The narrator begins recounting in summary fashion some of David's last psalms. He also gives a list of some of David's most valiant warriors and generals. The narrator is preparing readers for the death of David by in a sense summarizing much of his administration.

The narrator draws our attention to the greatness of David's kingdom and many of his administrators and warriors. He represents great times in Israel as he brought about peace and an expansion of Israel's kingdom.

## David Sins & Angers God against Israel

### 2 Samuel 24:1-17

This next scene is an interesting story with some unclear details. It is paralleled in 1 Chronicles 21.

Verse one begins with saying the anger of the Lord burned against Israel again. We are not told specifically what Israel did to anger God. Obviously, it would have been something in violation to the Law of Moses. Then, it says He (God) incited David against them (Israel)... This is a curious phrase. The author places the cause for the following action on God. He says God incited David to do something that would go against Israel's best interest.

The Hebrew word *incite* can mean to entice someone to take an action or cause them to carry out a rash action. Thus, we are told that God is the One responsible for working David up in such a way that David carries out a sinful action. The reason for God's doing so was because He intended to bring judgment on Israel for some previous sin by them that is unknown to us. What God incited David to do is to call for a national census, specifically of all the fighting aged men in Israel and Judah.

There are a couple of details to point out before we go further in the story. First, when we compare 2 Chronicles 21:1, it says this, "Then Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to count Israel." Thus, we have a discrepancy between the two books as to who is the primary responsible agent for inciting David to carry out the Census, God or Satan?

Secondly, we are unsure as to what was specifically sinful about the census David ordered. Technically, there was nothing sinful according to the Law of Moses if Israel took a census. However, there were rules to follow in doing so. Exodus 30:12-16 says God instructed that if a census is taken, the fighting men (20 years and older) must pay a ransom of a half shekel. Even God ordered Moses to take a census of Israel, more than once (see Numbers 1:2, 4:2, 26:2).

How would you resolve the textual difference between 2 Samuel 24:1 and 2 Chronicles 21:1 as to whether it was God or Satan who incited David?

What about the census do you think may have been sinful?

## Who Really Incited David to Sin?

Hebrew authors often told narrative stories to make a theological point, or to draw particular emphasis to something important. 2 Samuel wants us to note that no matter who incited David to carry out the census, it was ultimately under God's providential will that David carries it out. We must be careful to never say God causes people to sin (see James 1:13-15). God did not tempt nor directly cause David to sin.

I believe we can interpret this just like what we see recorded in Exodus concerning how God dealt with Pharaoh. When God told Moses that He would carry out plagues against Egypt, He said that Pharaoh would harden his own heart in response. Later on though, God switched His wording to say that God would harden Pharaoh's heart. Both can be true because it was not that God was directly *causing* Pharaoh to harden his heart. Rather, God knew that His plague actions would cause Pharaoh to harden his own heart in response to what God was doing.

I think in a similar way we can say that David sinned, but God knew what actions were needed to get David to do the census. Why? God intended to bring about His ultimate will through David's sinful action. God does not condone sin, but He can let sin happen to carry out His plans. 1 Chronicles places the emphasis on Satan. I think we can bring the two together by suggesting that Satan was the one who was given an open door of opportunity to incite David to sinfully carry out a census. And all the while God knew this would happen and He permitted Satan to do this with David. Why? Because God had higher plans for letting Satan incite David to sin, rather than stopping Satan. God had His own purposes to let it run its course so He could bring about necessary divine punishment on Israel for their sins.

As we will see later, God also used this event to bring about the plans to build the Temple of God and its major altar.

## What was Sinful about the Census?

Concerning the sinfulness of the census we are left only to speculate. As we said earlier there is nothing sinful about the census in and of itself. Commentators have speculated along two main theories. Perhaps David failed to properly collect the half shekel tax and God judged Israel for this. Others say it must have been David's personal motivation for the census that was sinful.

I am inclined to believe that the sin lies with David's motives for the census. I believe his heart's reason for the census was sinful. The prove for me comes down to how Joab and the military officers respond to David's request for the census.

In 2 Samuel 24:3 we see Joab's response to David's request for a census is extreme hesitation. Even the violent man of war Joab knows that what David wants is not godly. Joab questions David's heart on this matter, "but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" This says to me David's heart behind the census was sinful. Furthermore, verse 4 says the king's order prevailed against Joab "and against the commanders of the army." This means that the other military officers knew that David's desire for this census was not a good thing.

Perhaps David wanted to gloat over Israel's mighty military numbers and selfishly presume as the king that he had all this might and no one could oppose him. Or, perhaps David had a lapse of trust in God to protect Israel, so he needed to see for his own peace of mind just how strong Israel's fighting forces were. We cannot be sure but nonetheless we know his motivation behind the census was sinful.

### David's Guilty Conscience

Joab reports that Israel has 800,000 fighting age men from Israel and Judah had 500,000 men. This was a massive army for their day and meant that David's kingdom could have been considered a superpower of its time. 1 Chronicles records slightly different numbers. It says Israel had 1,100,000 fighting men and Judah specifically had 470,000 fighting men. Scholars have different theories resolving these number differences. Some say 2 Samuel's numbers are Israel plus Judah ( $800,000 + 500,000 = 1$  million). However, 1 Chronicles may mean 1,100,000 was all of Israel's fighting men, including Judah, and then gives a special notation that within that 1.1 million were Judah's 470,000. Hebrew authors were also known to use round number approximations.

What is more interesting is 1 Chronicles 21:6 says, "But he (*Joab*) did not count Levi and Benjamin among them, because the king's command was abhorrent to Joab." Joab may have thought he was doing the king a favor by not completing the census 100%. Joab knew David's census was ungodly and he may have rightly assumed that after they do it, God will punish them. Joab could have thought he may spare Israel discipline from God if he secretly failed to complete the census. Thus, Joab decided to deceive David and report incomplete numbers.

2 Samuel 24:10 says that David's heart "struck" him. His conscience got to him, and he knew what he had done was wrong. He confessed his sin to God and begged God's forgiveness.

## David's Choice of Punishment

### 2 Samuel 24:11-17

God lets David chose between seven years of famine, three months of being defeated by enemies, or three days of a plague in the land. David chooses three days of a plague because he reasons that letting God directly doll out the punishment might also mean God holds back some of it because of His mercy.

God sends a great plague for three days throughout the land and 70,000 men are killed. As the angel was going to send the plague to Jerusalem, God called for the plague to stop. David begged God to divert His wrath away from the people and directly on to David and his house, since it was he who sinned.

Do you think the punishment fit the crime?

## God's Altar Site

2 Samuel 24:16b says the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. God tells David to erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah. David obeys and approaches Araunah's land. Araunah meets David and when David explains that he must build an altar to the Lord on his threshing floor, Araunah agrees that David can do whatever he needs to do with his land. David offers to buy the land. At first Araunah wants to give it away, but David presses on him that he must purchase it.

David buys the land from Araunah and builds an altar to God there. He offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. God heeded the prayers and stopped the plague in Israel.

Through this tragedy, God set the stage for the Temple to be built. The tract of land that David purchased and built the altar on will later be the place where God commands the Temple to be built.

## Conclusion

With this we end the books of 1 & 2 Samuel. We see in stories like the one from this lesson that God does not cause people to sin, but He can permit people to sin in order to bring about His plans. The plague was a tragedy, but it was also God's just

discipline on His sinful people. Without God's mercy the plague probably would have been much worse.

At the same time, God can accomplish good purposes amid tragedy. From this tragedy, God caused David to secure the land that will house the future Temple. This sets the stage for Solomon to build it. The Temple will be a sign that God had established a permanent house among His people.

God could have abandoned Israel and left them in their sin, but the fact God had David secure the land site for the future temple and the altar shows that God will not abandon His people.

I hope you see through looking at the Old Testament so far how that things happening in the Old Testament are in many ways connected and setting the stage for future events to come, especially with Jesus Christ.

My argument is that the Bible's grand story is about the Kingdom of God and Christ is its Savior and King. David was not perfect, but He was chosen by God to be Israel's king and temporary savior from their enemies. But David could not be their spiritual savior, since he needed a Savior too.

1 & 2 Samuel show us that God established an earthly kingdom in Israel and that He had chosen a king after His heart, David. Through David, God led His people to stability and expansion.

As we begin 1 Kings, we will see the transition from David to Solomon, the building of God's permanent dwelling, then the terrible civil wars in Israel. Despite all of this, God never failed to keep His promises to Abraham and David. Jesus Christ fulfills them all.