



# Let Us Fall Now into the Hand of the LORD

## The Numbering of the People

### I - The Command



I - The Command

- The Context

- God's Command

Core: True faith is focused on the salvation of others.

Why: TBD



So many surprising and seemingly disconnected things happen here.



# Questions

God is an adversary. Joab corrects David. David finds the location for the temple.

And this chapter prompts *many* questions:

- 1 - Why was God referred to as Satan? Against whom was He an adversary?
- 2 - Why was it a sin for David to number the people?
- 3 - How could God inspire David to sin?
- 4 - Did God incite David just so that He could destroy Israel?
- 5 - How did Joab have better spiritual perception than David?
- 6 - Why was David so fixated on numbering Israel, even after being rebuked?
- 7 - Why was David oblivious of his sin until Joab returned?
- 8 - Why did God kill 70,000 Israelites because of *David's sin*?



2 Samuel places this record between David's last words and Adonijah's revolt.

# The Context



1 Chronicles places it just before David's arrangement of the workers in the temple.



Death of Nahash	2 Samuel 10:1	1 Chronicles 19:1
Joab's Siege of Rabbah	2 Samuel 11:1	1 Chronicles 20:1
David and Bathsheba	2 Samuel 11:2-12:25	
Joab's Defeat of Rabbah	2 Samuel 12:26-31	1 Chronicles 20:2-3
David's War with the Philistines		1 Chronicles 20:4-8
Amnon and Tamar	2 Samuel 13-14	
Absalom's Rebellion	2 Samuel 15-18	
Aftermath of Absalom's Rebellion	2 Samuel 19-20	
Appendices	2 Samuel 21-23	
David's Numbering of the People	2 Samuel 24	1 Chronicles 21



## Events of David's Old Age:

David's Numbering of the People	2 Samuel 24	1 Chronicles 21
Solomon's Charge to Build <u>the Temple</u>		1 Chronicles 22
Adonijah's Rebellion	1 Kings 1:1-38	
David's Old-Age Anointing of Solomon	1 Kings 1:39	1 Chronicles 23:1
David's Ordering of <u>the Temple</u> Services		1 Chronicles 23-27
David's Offering for <u>the Temple</u>		1 Chronicles 28
Solomon's Second Coronation	1 Kings 2:1-4	1 Chronicles 29:22
David's Death	1 Kings 2:10	1 Chronicles 29:28

Do you notice a theme of this time?

The incident took place at the end of his life.

1 Chronicles 23:27 - “For by the last words of David the Levites were numbered from twenty years old and above.”

Specifically, in the last year.

1 Chronicles 26:31 - “Among the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief, even among the Hebronites, according to the generations of his fathers. In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought for, and there were found among them mighty men of valour at Iazer of Gilead.”

cp. 2 Samuel 24:5



And, that time can be summarized with a verse from the Psalms:

Psalm 69:9 → “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”

He was fixated on **preparing for the temple** before his death!

But what about when he numbered the people?

Indeed, his thoughts were on the temple *just after* the incident on Moriah...

What was he thinking before that?



As Christadelphians we are adept at comparing the parallel records.

Except that isn't true.



Thus, we're well aware that God acted as an adversary, or satan, against David.

Take a look at the passages again:

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.”

1 Chronicles 21:1 - “And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.”

God was angry with Israel and worked against Israel—not David!

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.”

“anger” = אַף H639 literally means “nose” or “face”

“kindled” = חָרָה H2734 “to burn”

This wasn't just God being *upset*.

It's as though His face was on fire!

He was burning up with wrath!

Thus, it's how God felt when Moses gave excuse after excuse:

Exodus 4:14 → “and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses”

And when the Israelites complained that they were sick of the manna:

Numbers 11:33 → “the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people”

And if the people forsook His covenant:

Joshua 23:16 → “then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you”

Or worshipped idols: Judges 2:20, 3:8, 10:7

It is a phrase used when God is pushed and pushed and then forsaken.

Therefore, in this chapter, Israel is *full of sin*.



Somehow, this census would provide God with an opportunity to decimate Israel.

But, is that really how God works?

## *A Reason to Punish*



If we have angered Him...

...does He need to create a situation in which we defy Him and He can punish us?



Scripture often begins like a puzzle.

# Biblical Language



It gives an end result, or summary, first.

And then it gives the details of how that result was achieved.

This happens all throughout the stories of the kings:

2 Kings 3:1-3 - “Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.”



David's conquest of Jerusalem is described in this way:

I Chronicles 11:4-6 - "And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. And the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, Thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David. And David said, Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain. So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief."

There's also an instance in the story of the census:

1 Chronicles 21:6-9 - "But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab. And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying..."

Compare:

2 Samuel 24:9-11 - "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. 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. For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying..."



The smiting didn't occur until **after David had chosen the consequence!**

Another instance of this language occurs at the end of the chapter.

With the reader being told *twice* that God stopped the plague. 2 Samuel 24:16, 25

And, the entire book of Revelation has this structure.

Perhaps, then, this first verse can be read differently.

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.”



this is a summary and the rest of the chapter is the details!

there is no *therefore* or *thus* connecting the two parts of the verses.

God wasn't angry with the people *before* the census.

He was angry with them *because* of the census.

But why would He be angry with the people over David's sin?

And not only so—consider Who prompted David to number the people...

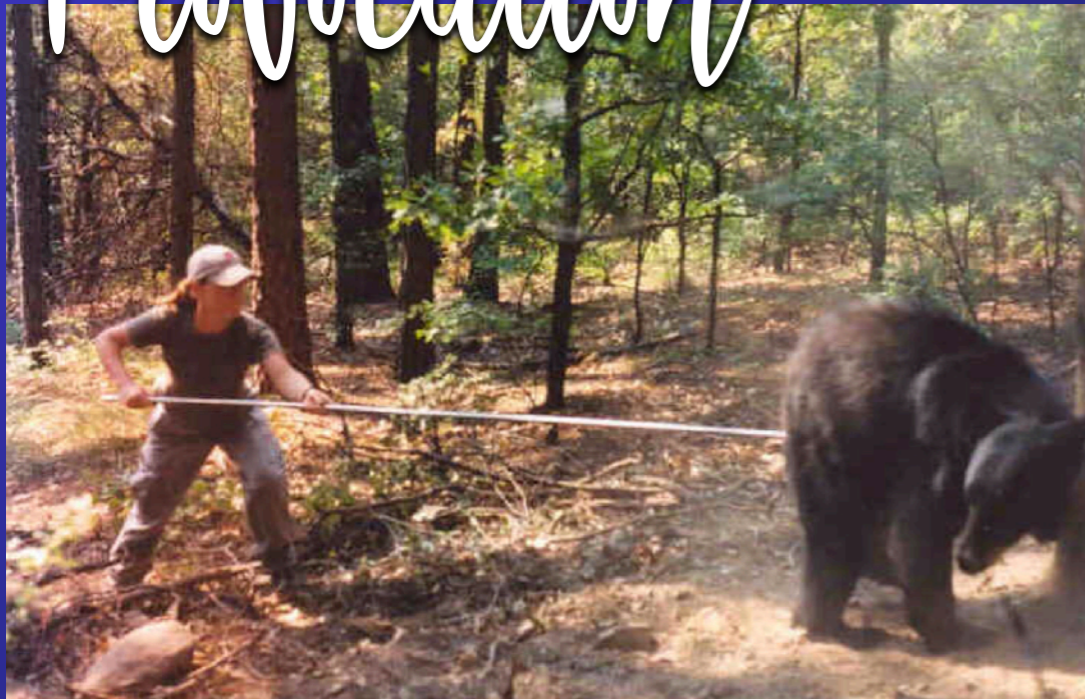
2 Samuel 24:1 - “He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.”

1 Chronicles 21:1 - “And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.

God incited David to do this!

But how?

# Provocation



The Hebrew is a bit more clear.

David isn't the one who said “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

“וַיִּסֵּת אֶת-דָּוִד בָּהֶם לֵאמֹר לֵךְ מִנָּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-יְהוּדָה” - 2 Samuel 24:1

“to say” = H559

### The Infinitive לֵאמֹר

The infinitive לֵאמֹר has a special role in biblical Hebrew. Since the Bible has very little punctuation, לֵאמֹר is used to introduce a direct quotation. It is usually translated as **saying**, but can also be replaced with quotation marks in many sentences.

And Moses said to the children of Israel, saying ...  
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר ...

And she called his name Joseph, saying ...  
וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר ...

*The First Hebrew Primer, 212.*

2 Samuel 24:1 - “He moved David against them, saying, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’”



2 Samuel 24:1 YLT - “An adversary moveth David about them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'”

2 Samuel 24:1 Roth - “He suffered David to be moved against them, saying, Go, count Israel and Judah.”

2 Samuel 24:1 NIV - “He incited David against them, saying, ‘Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.’”

2 Samuel 24:1 ESV - “He incited David against them, saying, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’”

Thus, God *commanded* David to number the people.

So what was this census?

And did God actually command David to sin?

Oftentimes David's numbering is accounted to him as a sin.

# The Sin of Numbering

A number of different reasons can be given as to why.

- 1 - David was relying on his own strength and wanted to know the size of the army
- 2 - David simply skipped numbering the Gentiles
- 3 - Numbering was only allowed if God commanded it



At this point, however, consider what David says about his motivation:

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 Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people.”

We have to dig deeper for a motive.

It's difficult to get around God commanding David to number the people.

cp. James 1:13

And, taking a census wasn't unheard of.

# Numbering the People

The possibility of doing so was built into the law.

Exodus 30:11-16



Every man twenty years and older had to pay a half shekel

If they did not, there would be a plague

The money would go to God

The book of Numbers received its name because of the censuses.

Numbers 1:1-3 → “Take ye the sum of all the congregation”

Did you notice the military connection?

“all that are able to go forth to war in Israel”

!!!! It wasn't wrong to assess military strength!

Because of that focus, the Levites were left out. v. 45-50

Numbers 26:1-2 → “Take the sum of all the congregation”

“all that are able to go to war in Israel”

And again, the Levites were not numbered. v. 62

While it isn't mentioned, presumably both of these censuses collected the tax...  
...since there was no plague.



Apparently there was nothing sinful about numbering the nation's military strength.

Thus...

Joshua also numbered the people                      Joshua 8:10

So did Saul—during his time of faith                      1 Samuel 11:8

And so did David at a previous time                      2 Samuel 18:1

It was simply a logistical thing that made sense to do...

...who would try to lead people **without knowing how many they were leading?**

...who would try to fight a war **without knowing how many soldiers they had?**



At the same time, David's census seems to have a different motivation...

# *A Faithful Motivation*

...than just finding out the number of people in the army.



Later in Chronicles, the record gives a bit more information:

I Chronicles 27:23-24 → “he would increase Israel like to the stars of heaven”  
this is a reference to the promises to Abraham!  
thus, David wasn't concerned about future numbers!

David's attitude was certainly faithful.

But how was numbering the people faithful?



There was another instance in which the Israelites were numbered:

Exodus 38:24-26 - "All the gold that was occupied for the work in all the work of the holy place, even the gold of the offering, was twenty and nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation was an hundred talents, and a thousand seven hundred and threescore and fifteen shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary: A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men."

Moses numbered the people when he was gathering materials for the tabernacle.

Why?

Exodus 38:27-28 - “And of the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary, and the sockets of the vail; an hundred sockets of the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. And of the thousand seven hundred seventy and five shekels he made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their chapiters, and filleted them.”

The money from the census was used to build the tabernacle!

Is it just a coincidence that in the chapters **immediately following** the numbering...

...David prepares the materials for the temple?

David's separate censuses seem to point towards a temple-related motive.



# *Later Censuses*

1 - The Gentiles

2 - The Levites



## 1 - The Gentiles

The record in Chronicles continues to tell the story after the chapter break:

1 Chronicles 22:1-2 → “David commanded to gather the strangers”  
for the purpose of building the house!  
but how did he know where the strangers lived?  
and how many there were?

2 Chronicles 2:17-18 → “after the numbering wherewith David his father...”

Right after the incident at the threshingfloor, David could gather the gentiles...

...because they had been included in the census! cp. 2 Samuel 24:6-7 ESV

## 2 - The Levites

David numbered the Levites afterward—just like Moses.

Note the reason for his numbering of the Levites:

I Chronicles 23:3-5 → “were to set forward the work of the house”

I Chronicles 23:27-28 → “for the service of the house of the LORD”

I Chronicles 25:1, 7 → “separated to the service”

Again, it was *all about the temple!*

So why did David number the people?

Probably for **the same reason** as his other censuses.

The zeal for God's house had eaten him up!



And thus it fits beautifully into its context.



# The Temple

1 - David was old and thinking about what mattered most to him.



2 - And it was the beginning of God's commands for the ordering of the temple.

1 Chronicles 28:11-13, 19 - "Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat, And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things: Also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the LORD."



# Conclusion

David's numbering of the people was no sin.

1 Kings 15:5 → "save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite"

And yet the repercussions here—70,000 deaths—were far greater!



Instead, it was **faithful obedience** to a divine command.

And it was motivated by **love** for God's house:



And it was motivated by love for God's house:

Taking a census would

- allow him to collect metals for the buildings
- tell him how many people were available to work  
cp. 1 Kings 5:13
- show him who supported his efforts  
cp. 1 Chronicles 21:3



Ultimately, it was the first step in making a “house of prayer for all nations.”

That’s what **the man after God’s own heart** would be thinking about.

And that’s what we should be thinking about too—the salvation of those around us.

Despite his own needs, Christ taught, fed, and healed the five thousand.

The apostle Paul saw the Thessalonian ecclesia's salvation as his "crown of rejoicing."

Sometimes we want to say that our *faith* is between us and God.

But it can't be.

We are a body.

The *author and finisher of faith* gave his life for others.

Because true faith is focused on the salvation of others.