

David Takes A Census

Notes for 12 Apr

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Read: [2 Samuel 24](#)

The Census and God's Anger

Verse 1 of this passage says that God's anger burns against Israel so God incites David against Israel to conduct a census. I'm not sure it makes sense that God incites David to do the wrong thing.

Read also [1 Chronicles 21](#). This passage says that Satan stood up against Israel and tempted David to take a census of the people. This makes more sense to me, however, how should we interpret this? 2 Samuel 24 says nothing about Satan but rather puts it all on God. The author of 1 and 2 Samuel is inclined to say that God was the originator of all things, good or bad.

One commentator says that sometimes God allows Satan to do stuff as a way to test believers and purify them. I have always wondered why God would allow pain and suffering just to purify believers. I'm not sure this coincides with a God of Love. If it's unavoidable that's one thing but for God to specifically say, let's cause some pain and suffering to test them – I always found that view somewhat objectionable.

Lastly - what if it was David's own fear and pride that incited him to take a census and it's just convenient to blame either God or Satan.

- Discuss your views on who incited who or not and what you think this all means.

What is this Census Anyway?

What is meant by a census and why does this seem to be a bad thing?

First, read also [Numbers 1:1-5](#) and [Exodus 30:12](#).

One commentator states that, in those days, a man was only allowed to count what belonged to him. Israel did not belong to David, but to God. Hence God's anger.

There was also meant to be a ransom paid for the counting so a plague would not come on the people. Given that this was stated (???) years before this incident and the outcome of the census, I'm wondering if this is more than coincidence.

Also, as noted by another commenter, a census was preliminary to a draft of soldiers and a levying of taxes. It's possible that this census is about David wanting to increase his kingdom through human means and not by reliance on God. He notes that modern churches do this by wanting to increase their churches by marketing and salesmanship – is this the same thing?

- Discuss your views on the census.

Joab's Response

In verse three, Joab is obviously against the taking of a census, but the word of the king prevails. Joab's words are quite plain. As much as he's loyal to David, he thinks this is not a good idea.

In 1 Chronicles 21:6 it also says that Joab doesn't include Levi and Benjamin in the census. While Deuteronomy has specific instructions about not including Levi in a census, it's not clear why Joab did not include Benjamin.

- Given the complicated figure that Joab is – what does this say about Joab?

David's Repentance

The census takes quite some time to complete - nine months. Joab brings back the numbers and there are more numbers in Israel compared to Judah.

In verse 10 though, after David is given the numbers, he is troubled by what he has done. David has a sensitivity to when he has sinned. Here, again, we see David, when he has sinned, admit his guilt "I have done foolishly" and seeks the Lord.

Have a quick skim read of [2 Samuel 12](#), focusing on vv10-16. Compare/contrast his admission of wrongdoing regarding Bathsheba and Uriah and his desire to make things right in these incidents.

- Discuss David's reaction to his sin regarding the census.

God's Punishment

In verses 11-13, God allows David to choose the punishment for his sin. Famine, war or pestilence, in decreasing amounts of time.

- Why would God do this?

David chooses to be in God's hands, i.e. he chooses pestilence. One commentator notes that David and his family could have largely avoided the effects of war and famine, but pestilence means David and his family are equally at risk. It may also mean that David saw God as more merciful than man.

- Discuss

Verses 15-17 outline the plague but there is an interesting development – When the destroying angel turns to Jerusalem, God relents and says enough. It seems that David was right to trust in God's mercy. In verse 17 though, it states that David actually sees the angel of destruction and his response is to declare that he was the sinner and that the punishment should be against him and his household, not the innocent people of Israel.

- Discuss

David Builds an Altar

In verses 18-24 we see God's solution to the plague and David's sin come to an end. God sends the prophet Gad to give instructions to David to build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David follows these instructions, however there is some back and forth between David and Araunah about who shall pay for this. Araunah wants to give it to David freely,

but David insists on paying. Verse 24 interests me the most here, especially when David says, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord that cost me nothing".

- Discuss

Final Thoughts and Comments

Read [Psalm 91](#) and comment on David as a person.

Read also [Deuteronomy 17:14-20](#) about kingship and comment on David's kingship.