



David's Sinful Census

2 Samuel 24

In Numbers 1 & 26

God commanded Moses to take
a census.

And yet, in this chapter, David
numbers Israel, and it is quite a
different matter....



2 Samuel 24:1-4

1 Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” **2** The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, “Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people.” **3** But Joab said to the king, “Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?” **4** Nevertheless, the king’s word prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to register the people of Israel.

“Now Again...”

“the anger of the Lord burned against
Israel...”

The reason for the Lord’s wrath is not
stated, but as on previous occasions, it
must have stemmed from Israel’s
violation of some aspect of the Torah.



The Judgment

The Lord “incited David” to
“number Israel and Judah.”

Now...

Turn to 1 Chronicles 21:1



1 Chronicles 21:1

“Then Satan stood up against Israel
and moved David to number Israel.”



So...

Was it God or
Satan?

Yes.



One Explanation

Yahweh is the Lord of the universe,
exercising dominion over all
powers and authorities, and from
this position of utmost strength,
He enables Satan to entice David to
act foolishly so as to bring
judgment on Israel.





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- Takes *satan* as the common noun “adversary” and understands that David was incited by imminent attack to number his troops.
- And the ultimate cause for such an attack was the Lord’s anger at Israel.
- *1 Chronicles 21:1 A Study In Inter-Biblical Interpretation*



Here's What We Know

- God does not instigate or impel sinners to do evil.
- In no sense can God author what he disapproves of and makes his whole kingdom stand against.

How, then, are we to understand 24:1,
where God seems to instigate
something which He will immediately
label as sin?

God May and *Does*

Occasionally impel sinners to reveal the wickedness of their hearts in deeds.

God merely presents the opportunity and occasion for letting the evil desires of the heart manifest themselves outwardly.



Another Consideration:

When Were Each
of These Books
Written?





My Two Cents

- David sinned and Satan, not God, was to blame, and as a result, God sends a plague to punish all Israel.
- According to 24:1, David's subjects were just as guilty as their king, and thus, God deals with all Israel through the act of the king who exemplified the national spirit of pride.



4 Levels of Causality

1. Final Cause: God

- God was angry with Israel.

2. Secondary Cause: Satan

- Satan stirred up enemy forces.

3. Instrumental Cause: Physical Enemies

- A military threat is evident.

4. Efficient Cause: David

- David fails to trust God and numbers the people.

David Orders Joab

“Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people.”

Is there any biblical mandate for this?



Exodus 30:12

“When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them.”



So, What is the Sin?

- It was either:

1. David's motivation for the census

or

2. The manner in which it was executed



Maybe it was self-aggrandizing?

- David may have wanted to boast about the number of fighting men in Israel.
- From Keil and Delitzsch:
“The true kernel of David’s sin was to be found, no doubt, in self-exaltation, inasmuch as he sought for the strength and glory of his kingdom in the number of the people and their readiness for war.”

Or, Perhaps...

- It may be that David did not require all enrolled males to pay the half-shekel ransom required by the Torah, an oversight guaranteed to bring a plague against Israel.
- **Parallel: Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem**



Or Maybe...

- The census was done as a draft notice or a mustering of the troops.
- Some conclude that David sinned by numbering those men under 20 years of age – an illegal act.
- Others see the census as a blatant doubting of God's promise.



The Best Solution (IMHO)

- The census was motivated by presumption.
- God had given David no objective or reason to go out to battle.
- Only David's pride and ambition could have brought on such an act.



Joab Doesn't Like It

“Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?”

This act may endanger Joab's men.



Nevertheless...

“the king’s word prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to register the people of Israel.”



2 Samuel 24:5-8

5 They crossed the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the city that is in the middle of the valley of Gad and toward Jazer. **6** Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi, and they came to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon, **7** and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and of the Canaanites, and they went out to the south of Judah, to Beersheba. **8** So when they had gone about through the whole land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.



9 Months & 20 Days

Since this involved Israel's top military officers, it was likely initiated during a time of peace and concluded by the spring, "the time when kings go off to war."



2 Samuel 24:9-10

9 And Joab gave the number of the registration of the people to the king; and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men. **10** Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."

Census Totals

- 2 Samuel 24:9 –
 - Israel: 800,000
 - Judah: 500,000
- 1 Chronicles 21:5 –
 - Israel: 1,100,000
 - Judah: 470,000



They May Simply Be Incorrect

- 1 Chronicles 21:6 –

“But he did not number Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king’s command was abhorrent to Joab.”

- 1 Chronicles 27:24 –

“Joab the son of Zeruiah had begun to count them, but did not finish; and because of this, wrath came upon Israel, and the number was not included in the account of the chronicles of King David.”

And Maybe...

- Joab presents incorrect figures to David in hopes of averting a divine judgment against the king and the nation.
- Perhaps the figures in Samuel are Joab's inaccurate count, and the figures in Chronicles are the true numbers.



When David Receives the Numbers

- His “heart troubled him” as he recognized that the census was in violation of the law.
- **Wisely, David takes full responsibility:**
“I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.”



2 Samuel 24:11-14

11 When David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, **12** "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the Lord says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you."'" **13** So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to Him who sent me." **14** Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

The Lord Hears David's Confession

And the next morning, “the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad.”

- Judgment is coming, but David is left to decide its form:

“I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you.”



Three Alternatives

1. “seven years of famine...in your land”
2. “flee three months before your foes while they pursue you”
3. “three days’ pestilence in your land”

• David was in “great distress,” but he falls back on the timeless principle of Genesis 18:25 –

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

David's Decision

“Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.”

David preferred the wounds of God to the wounds of an enemy.

He has experienced God's mercy already, and David puts Israel in the Lord's hands.



The Rabbinic Interpretation:

“If I choose famine the people will say that I chose something which will affect them and not me, for I shall be well supplied with food; if I choose war, they will say that the king is well protected; let me choose pestilence, before which all are equal.”



2 Samuel 24:15-17

15 So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. **16** When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, “It is enough! Now relax your hand!” And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. **17** Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, “Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but **these sheep**, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father’s house.”

Beginning That Very Morning

“the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel”

- Unrelenting for a period of 3 days – “until the appointed time” – an “angel” of the Lord inflicted a plague on Israel.
- In the process, “seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.”



How Many

of the 70,000 do
you think were
soldiers?



It Could've Been Worse

Were it not for the Lord's mercy –
“When the angel stretched out his
hand toward Jerusalem to destroy
it, the Lord relented from the
calamity and said to the angel who
destroyed the people, “It is enough!
Now relax your hand!”



David's Courageous Faith

Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, “Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father’s house.”



2 Samuel 24:18-23

18 So Gad came to David that day and said to him, “Go up, erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” **19** David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the Lord had commanded. **20** Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king. **21** Then Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” And David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be held back from the people.” **22** Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. **23** Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God accept you.”

David Receives Instructions

- “Go up, erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite,” the spot on which the plague had stopped.
- In Genesis 35:1, the Lord commanded Jacob to build an altar, and now he orders David to do the same.



The top of Mount Moriah, called **The Rock** (Arabic "Sakhra"), is now visible inside the Islamic Dome of the Rock. King Solomon built the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies) of the temple on this rock (cf. 2 Chron. 3:1).

Araunah's threshing floor, located on the top of Mount Moriah, was the place where David built an altar to God. According to Jewish tradition, it is the same place where Abraham built an altar to sacrifice his son Isaac (see Gen. 22:2; 2 Chron. 3:1).

Mount Moriah is the name of the hilltop north of the city of David. It is part of the same Eastern Hill of Jerusalem on which David built his city. This hill is first mentioned in the book of Genesis as the place where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:2).

David's Palace was built on the ruins of the Jebusite Citadel. The excavated "Stepped Stone Structure" supported this building on the east.

Western Hill

Eastern Hill

Central Valley
(later: Tyropoeon Valley)

Valley Gate

"Stepped Stone Structure"

Kidron Valley

Gates

Pool (receives water from Gihon Spring)

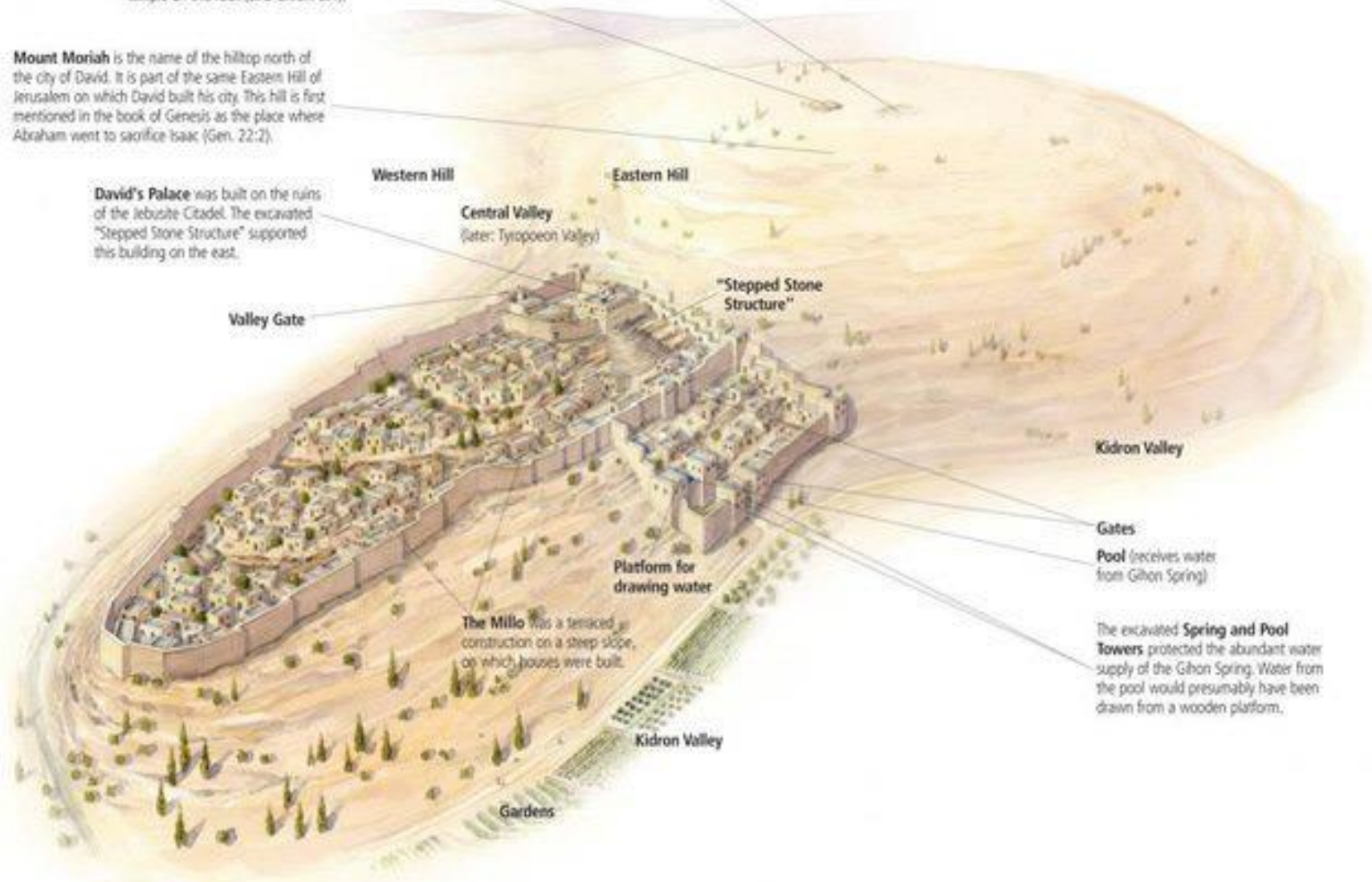
Platform for drawing water

The **Millo** was a terraced construction on a steep slope, on which houses were built.

The excavated **Spring and Pool Towers** protected the abundant water supply of the Gihon Spring. Water from the pool would presumably have been drawn from a wooden platform.

Kidron Valley

Gardens





2 Chronicles 3:1

Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.



“David went up”

“Just as the Lord had commanded.”

Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God accept you.”

2 Samuel 24:24-25

24 However, the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. **25** David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the Lord was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.

Araunah's Offer Is Sincere

But David does the correct thing.

In addition, David understood the religious imperative of true sacrifice:

Religion that costs nothing is worth nothing, either to God or man.



What Was The Result?

“Thus the Lord was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.”

How About a Few Christ Parallels?



The Ultimate Son of David to Come

- Would also give sacrificially on a hill near Jerusalem for his people so that an even more tragic plague might be stopped.
- David's sacrifice involved the use of wood and blood on a hill outside the city; so did Jesus' sacrifice.
- David's sacrifice stopped a physical plague that had taken the lives of many Israelites; by Jesus' wounds they will be healed.

In Two Weeks:



