

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

The NIV Commentary notes that the writer jumps forward about 20 years in time at this point in his record.

This chapter opens with a very thought-provoking verse. First we are told that Satan stood up against Israel. That is how it has been throughout history, and it is how it will continue to be until the LORD establishes His kingdom on earth. Satan hates Israel because it is as a man of Israel that the LORD Jesus would come to earth to bring about the defeat of Satan through His death and resurrection and the eventual establishment of His kingdom on the throne of David. Satan knows his time is limited, and he is determined to cause as much death as he can.

We are then told that he provoked or seduced (from the Hebrew) David into numbering Israel because he knew that would bring about God's judgment against His people. Wouldn't it be interesting to know exactly how Satan accomplished his objective? It's important for we followers of Jesus to recognize that we are just as susceptible to Satan's seductions as David was.

The record in Samuel words this differently: *"And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah."*

Putting these two accounts together, I think it is clear that Satan was only allowed to provoke or seduce David as an instrument in the LORD's hand. We aren't told exactly what caused the LORD's anger, but His anger is always justified. As with David, I personally do not believe that Satan is allowed to provoke or seduce those that trust the LORD as Savior unless it is as an instrument to bring about the LORD's purposes. This in no way absolves David or us of our guilt when giving in to the enemy's seduction or provocation. The LORD in His omniscience knows how we will respond and uses that knowledge in accomplishing His will.

1Chronicles 21:2 And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.

1Chronicles 21:3 And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?

David told Joab and his commanders to go and number Israel from Beersheba (in the south) to Dan (in the north); i.e., the whole nation. They were to report the number to him when their task was completed. Context will show that this numbering was intended to reveal the number of men of military age.

Joab, who was never hesitant to speak his mind (as learned in our study of

Samuel), protested. He basically said it shouldn't matter how many there were because that was in God's hands. However many, they were all servants of the king. He questioned David why this was necessary because he knew that the LORD would count it against Israel. Implied—A census should only be taken as commanded by the LORD.

Joab recognized what David did not. I believe he knew that David's desire to number the available men of military age was motivated by pride. We know that it was wrong because Satan was at the root of it. Joab knew it was wrong because he knew David so well.

Guzik offers a good explanation on why the census was wrong: "The principle of Exodus 30:12 speaks to *Gods ownership of His people*. In the thinking of these ancient cultures, a man only had the right to count or number what belonged to him. Israel didn't belong to David; Israel belonged to God. It was up to the LORD to command a counting, and if David counted he should only do it at God's command and receiving ransom money to atone for the counting."

Exodus 30:12 "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them."

1Chronicles 21:4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem.

1Chronicles 21:5 And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all *they* of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah *was* four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword.

1Chronicles 21:6 But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

David refused to heed Joab's warning, so Joab conducted the census as commanded. The results of the census revealed that there were 1,100,000 men able to handle a sword; Judah added 470,000 men to that number. Joab purposely did not count the men of Levi and Benjamin because he was so angry with David.

The NIV Commentary offers this explanation for the difference in the numbers in this account and that in Samuel: "The total figures that they gathered require clarification in two directions. (1) In comparison with those given in 2Sa 24:9, Ezra's sum of 1,100,000 for all Israel is larger than Samuel's 800,000, which probably did not include the regularly organized army (note the lack of an "all" before "Israel") of 288,000; but his sum of 470,000 for Judah is a bit smaller than Samuel's 500,000, which may here simply be a round number."

Clarke notes that the rabbis have their own explanation for Joab not numbering Levi and Benjamin: "Joab, seeing that this would bring down destruction upon the people, purposed to save two tribes. Should David ask, Why have you not

numbered the Levites? Joab purposed to say, Because the Levites are not reckoned among the children of Israel. Should he ask, Why have you not numbered Benjamin? he would answer, Benjamin has been already sufficiently punished, on account of the treatment of the woman at Gibeah: if, therefore, this tribe were to be again punished, who would remain?"

1Chronicles 21:7 ¶ And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.

1Chronicles 21:8 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.

1Chronicles 21:9 And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying,

1Chronicles 21:10 Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three *things*: choose thee one of them, that I may do *it* unto thee.

God was displeased about the census and judged Israel accordingly. David recognized quite quickly that he had greatly sinned by acting so foolishly and asked the LORD for forgiveness.

The LORD spoke to Gad, David's personal prophet, and gave him a message for the king. In it, He offered David the choice of one of three punishments.

1Chronicles 21:11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee

1Chronicles 21:12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh *thee*; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.

1Chronicles 21:13 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great *are* his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

So Gad went to inform David of the LORD's message and the three options of judgment from which he could choose.

1. Three years of famine
2. Three months to be destroyed by his enemies
3. Three days of pestilence throughout the land of Israel at the hand of the LORD

David was in great distress because all of the choices were frightening. He reasoned that it would be better to be at the mercy of the LORD's judgment because of His great compassion. He knew they would get no compassion from their enemies.

1Chronicles 21:14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

1Chronicles 21:15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and

said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

1Chronicles 21:16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

1Chronicles 21:17 And David said unto God, *Is it not I that* commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but *as for* these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

So the LORD sent pestilence throughout the land of Israel and 70,000 men died. He then sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, but as he began his work, the LORD saw the people through eyes of great compassion and told the angel to stop; he had done enough.

We are told that the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshingfloor of Ornan (called Araunah in Samuel) the Jebusite. David could see the angel standing between heaven and earth (up in the air) holding a drawn sword that was stretched out over Jerusalem, a position indicative of judgment. It seems that some of the leaders of Israel could see him also since they all fell upon their faces before him.

David confessed to God that he was the one that committed the sin by commanding that the people be numbered. He pointed out that his people were guiltless in this matter. He asked the LORD to limit His judgment to the house of David and that He not slaughter (from the Hebrew for *plagued*) the people.

We know, however, (as stated in the comments on verse 1 above) that the LORD wasn't just angry with David, He was angry with the people of Israel; and the LORD is never angry without reason.

1Chronicles 21:18 ¶ Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

1Chronicles 21:19 And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.

The angel of the LORD commanded Gad to tell David to go and set up an altar to the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David did so.

1Chronicles 21:20 And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat.

1Chronicles 21:21 And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with *his* face to the ground.

1Chronicles 21:22 Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of *this* threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt

grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.
1Chronicles 21:23 And Ornan said unto David, Take *it* to thee, and let my lord the king do *that which is good* in his eyes: lo, I give *thee* the oxen *also* for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

1Chronicles 21:24 And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take *that which is thine* for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.

When Ornan saw the angel, he and his four sons hid themselves. When the angel disappeared (I assume), Ornan proceeded to thresh his wheat. As he was working, David showed up at his threshingfloor. Ornan bowed himself before David, honoring him as his king.

David asked Ornan to sell him the threshingfloor so that he could build an altar to the LORD there. He explained that this was necessary to stop God's hand of judgment against the people. He also stated his intention to pay full price for the value of the land.

Ornan told David that he could have the land. He even offered to give David the things he needed for his offerings—the oxen, the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for a grain offering.

David refused Ornan's offer and stated that he was determined to pay full price for the land. He explained that he could not make his offering before the LORD in good faith if it had cost him nothing.

You have to love Ornan's willingness to give, but David recognized an important truth. What we give to the LORD must come from personal sacrifice to have any meaning. That doesn't mean that it has to be of great material value. He even considers our praise of Him a sacrifice because it is a personal expression of love and honor.

Hebrews 13:15 "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

It should be our mindset as Christians to present our whole being to the LORD as a living sacrifice with a willingness to be used however, whenever and wherever He so chooses.

Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

1Chronicles 21:25 So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

1Chronicles 21:26 And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.

1Chronicles 21:27 And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his

sword again into the sheath thereof.

So David paid Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight (about 15 pounds) to buy the threshingfloor. He built an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. He then called on the LORD in prayer, and the LORD answered by sending fire from heaven to consume the burnt offering in a sign of acceptance. The LORD then commanded the angel to put away his sword.

Again, there is a discrepancy in the amount David paid as recorded in Samuel. Commentators note that the record in Samuel references only the threshingfloor, while the amount recorded here pertains to the whole surrounding area.

We learn later in scripture that this threshingfloor was on Mount Moriah where Solomon eventually built the temple. It is also identified with the place that Abraham offered Isaac on one of its mountains. I believe that event took place on another one of the mountains, the same one upon which Jesus was crucified—Calvary.

2 Chronicles 3:1 "Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite."

Genesis 22:2 "And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

The verse in 2Chronicles tells us that the angel was the preincarnate Jesus, since David had evidently told Solomon that "the LORD" appeared to him there.

1Chronicles 21:28 At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.

1Chronicles 21:29 For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon.

1Chronicles 21:30 But David could not go before it to enquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

When David saw that the Lord had answered his prayer, he offered more sacrifices there.

It is noted that the tabernacle of Moses and the original altar of burnt offering were located in the high place at Gibeon.

David chose not to go to Gibeon to offer his sacrifices because his experience had made him afraid. I guess because he had been commanded to go to Ornan's threshingfloor, and he did not want to disobey.

I liked this observation from Chuck Smith: "If David was a perfect man, if he never did anything wrong, then we would all of us be prone to say, 'Yes, but

David was perfect. I can see why God would use David. I could see why God blessed David, because he was such a perfect man. But God can't bless me and God can't use me, because I'm so imperfect.' So God is very careful to record for us the mistakes and the sins of these men that He used in such a mighty way in order that we would not be excusing ourselves and saying, 'Well, God can't use me.' For God can use you and wants to use you in spite of the fact that you have failed, and in spite of the fact that you're far from perfect."