



action and a failure to trust God, Hezekiah was the antithesis of this. When he learned of the threat of Assyria he looked to God and not the power of his own might. Because of his faith the Angel of the Lord killed the Assyrian army (which vastly outnumbered Israelite forces) but He did not destroy Jeru-

salem (2 Kings 19). In David's sin, he was not personally punished. Instead, he along with the nation as whole was forced to remember that their strength rested in God, not in their own numbers. It is interesting that in the next generation (in spite of this reduction due to the plague), Israel grew to its largest extent in its history (cf. 1 Kings 4:21-24). Israel's strength always rested in God. The same remains true for Christ's church in today.

religious strength. God wanted Israel to trust in Him and not in its own size and greatness. He wants the same of His *spiritual Israel*—the church. Whether many or few accept the truth, it is still the truth, and our confidence must rest in God and His word.

While David sinned through presumptuous



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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

What Was David's Sin in Numbering Israel?

By Kyle Pope

The selection of the site where the temple in Jerusalem was built came about in a most unusual way. Because David took a census of the Israelites, God was angry with him and told David that He would exact a punishment on the people (1 Chron. 21:1-8; 2 Sam. 24:1-11). God gave David a choice of which punishment He would inflict: three (or seven) years of famine, three months of defeat at the hands of their enemies, or three days of plague by the **"sword of the Lord"** (1 Chron. 21:9-13; 2 Sam. 24:10-14). The judgment was that the Angel of the Lord destroyed seventy-thousand Israelites (1 Chron. 21:14; 2 Sam. 24:15). As the Angel came to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord stopped the destruction when the Angel came to the threshing floor of a man named Araunah (or Ornan) (1 Chron. 21:15; 2 Sam. 24:16). David purchased this land and provided it to his son Solomon for the site where the temple would stand (1 Chron. 21:16-30; 2 Sam. 24:17-25). This is the same site where the Temple Mount now rises over the Old City of Jerusalem.

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
9:30 AM
10:30 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

To understand this unusual event we must ask the question posed in the title of this article: *What was David's sin in numbering the people?*

Scripture does not directly answer this question, but a few things can be inferred and a few possibilities deduced. First, it is clear that unlike the census Moses took, this did not come at the command of God (cf. Num. 1:2). 2 Samuel 24:1 records, **“the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them”** (NKJV). *Did God cause David to do this?*

No. This must be harmonized with 1 Chronicles 21:1 which says **“Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”** How can both statements be correct? 2 Samuel 24:1 must be understood in terms of what God allowed Satan to do not direct action on the part of God. This may be compared with Job 2:3. After Satan was allowed to bring trial upon Job, God said to Satan, **“he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.”** The same word is used in 2 Samuel 24:1 (**“moved”**) and Job 2:3 (**“incited”**). Although one concerns God and David, and the other Satan and God, both are interesting because of what is demonstrated in God's own words. Satan **“incited”** God **“to destroy”** Job, but God did not act directly—He allowed Satan to act and God speaks of this allowance as His own action. In the same way, God allowed Satan to act to **“move”** David, but 2 Samuel 24:1 speaks of God's allowance as God's action. *So what does this tell us about why David's action was sinful?* It indicates that David's action was not from God, but within Satan's will. So, David did not act by the command of God, but acted presumptuously to take this action.

A second possibility concerns David's motive. The text doesn't identify David's motive, but there may be some inference that he did this for military or political reasons. *Why would this be an offense to God?* A principle that runs throughout God's covenant with Israel was the power of numbers as a reflection of whether Israel trusted in God or its own power. In Deuteronomy 7:7 God declared, **“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples.”** When God sent Gideon to lead the Israelites, He declared, **“The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me’”** (Judg 7:2). As a young man David had understood this. He told Goliath, **“the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands”** (1 Sam. 17:4). Yet, it may be that in his old age David had either forgotten this or lost the same trust in God he had as a young man. Joab seemed to recognize what this reflected about trust in God. Although he hoped that the people would be multiplied **“a hundred times more than they are”** (2 Sam. 24:3; 1 Chron. 21:3) he feared David's action would bring guilt upon Israel. Each of the punishments that God offered would have resulted in a reduction in numbers (1 Chron. 21:11-14). What happens is that God essentially forced on David a reduction of numbers (comparable to the vol-

untary reduction under Gideon). This may indicate that at least part of the sin concerned misguided confidence. David was trusting more in the size of his army than in the power of God.

Both possibilities offer important lessons for us today. It is just as important for us to act on the instruction of God, but never to go beyond His word. There is no record that God commanded David *not* to take a census, but His silence indicated that David was not authorized to do so. David acted presumptuously by going beyond God's command, and we do the same if we add human innovations to worship, doctrine, or the organization of the Lord's church. In the same way, we must avoid seeing the size of a congregation, or the popularity of a message as the reason we can take confidence in