

You could say that this passage is all about
“Cents and Censers: Making Sense of David’s Census”

Why does David take a census?
Why is taking a census such a bad thing?

1. The Cursed Census (chapter 21)
a. David and His Faithful General (v1-6)

¹ *Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.*

Verse 1 says that Satan incited David to number Israel.

2 Samuel 24 says that the LORD incited David against Israel,
because the “anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel”.

It is easy to see that both can be true.

It is true that Satan incited David to number Israel.

The accuser loves to encourage sin and misery and death.

But it is also true that the LORD incited David against Israel –
since Satan could not have prevailed against the LORD’s anointed
unless the LORD had permitted it.

But the Chronicler wants you to see clearly that this census is evil.

And Joab recognizes this:

²*So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, "Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number." ³But Joab said, "May the LORD add to his people a hundred times as many as they are! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?"*

Joab understands the problem.

Exodus 30 required a tax for taking a census –
an atonement price for numbering the people of Israel,
to ransom the people when they were numbered.

And God had warned in Deuteronomy
that when you come into the land, you should not believe that your might and strength
are what delivers you –
but the LORD is the one who delivers you from your enemies (Dt 7-10).

So it appears that either David is trying to take a census without the tax;
or he is taking a census with the tax –

which creates a burden on Israel that they are not able to bear.

⁴*But the king's word prevailed against Joab. So Joab departed and went throughout all Israel and came back to Jerusalem.* ⁵*And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to David. In all Israel there were 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and in Judah 470,000 who drew the sword.* ⁶*But he did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, for the king's command was abhorrent to Joab.*

In verse 5 we hear that in Israel there were 1,100,000 soldiers; in Judah 470,000. Samuel reports the numbers as 800,000 and 500,000.

At least in the case of Judah, it is easy to see it as a matter of “rounding up.”

But we should not shy away from the conclusion

that biblical numbers are not intended as precise statements.

Eight hundred thousand and eleven hundred thousand

are both considered “in the ballpark”

But more important here is the comment in verse 6 that Joab did not include Levi or Benjamin.

Levi makes sense – since the Levites had a unique, priestly role in Israel.

But why Benjamin?

The most likely answer is that the tabernacle was located in Gibeon –
in Benjamin.

And so Joab did not want to get too close to the holy place during his numbering,
and so avoided Benjamin altogether.

(We'll see the importance of the tabernacle later in the passage)

b. Pick Your Poison: Famine, Sword, or Pestilence (v7-13)

⁷*But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel.*

Again, an interesting switch – since in Samuel it says that

“David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people.”

Now we hear not that David's heart struck him,

but that God struck Israel.

But in either case, David's response is exactly the same:

⁸*And David said to God, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."*

And the LORD offers David a choice: pick your poison – famine, sword, or pestilence.

⁹*And the LORD spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying,* ¹⁰*"Go and say to David, 'Thus says the LORD, Three things I offer you; choose one of them, that I may do it to you.'"* ¹¹*So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Choose what you will: ¹²either three years of*

famine, or three months of devastation by your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of the LORD, pestilence on the land, with the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." ¹³Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is very great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

David chooses three days of pestilence –
since the other two would leave Israel vulnerable to their enemies.

Three months of the sword could leave Israel under foreign powers.
Three years of famine could open Israel up to invasion.
Three days of plague means that it hits hard, and is over soon –
and thus the severity of the plague depends entirely on the LORD.

David has confidence in the mercy of the LORD.

c. The Angel of the LORD and David's Prayer (v14-17)

¹⁴So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. ¹⁵And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

And so God *sent* the angel of the LORD against Israel.
70,000 men of Israel fell.

And God *sent* the angel of the LORD against Jerusalem –
but as he was about to destroy Jerusalem,
the LORD *saw* and he relented
(this is precisely the form used in Genesis 6:6 before the flood
when God repented that he had made man;
and in Exodus 32 after the episode of the golden calf
when God repented of his threat to destroy all Israel;
and in Jonah 3 after Ninevah humbles itself before the LORD,
and God repents of his threat to destroy Ninevah.)

It is important to see that the LORD is the one who *sent* the pestilence.

It is also important to see that the LORD relented from the calamity.

The Chronicler wants you to see that God is not some impersonal deity
who simply acts from “on high” without any regard for his people.

Yes, the LORD *sent* the angel to destroy Jerusalem –
but as angel reached the threshing floor of Ornan,
and as it drew its sword to strike the city,
the LORD said, “Enough!”

When we say that the LORD has “foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,”
we *do not mean* that God has a cosmic blueprint for the universe,

and everything and everyone operates according to that design.

In 1 Samuel you get that beautiful statement of Samuel to Saul,
that God is not a man that he should repent –
and the next thing God does is repent of making Saul king! (15:29, 35)

As soon as you start thinking about God's plan in terms of a mechanical system,
or a mathematical formula,
you lose sight of the very *personal* way that God deals with his people.

Especially given the way that God had come to regret making Saul king,
it is striking that he never comes to that conclusion with David.

In some ways David was *worse* than Saul!
But ultimately, David *trusted* in the LORD.

And thus David was right.
God is merciful!
And when God *saw* that the angel was about to destroy Jerusalem,
the LORD relented.

But notice *where* he relented.

The threshing floor of Ornan was outside the city of Jerusalem.
It was there – in the mountains of Moriah –
that Abraham had gone when God told him to sacrifice Isaac, his son.
In the same place where God had relented and shown mercy to Abraham,
God now relents and shows mercy to David – and all Jerusalem.

But the angel of the LORD stays at the threshing floor of Ornan.
God has already relented – but even as God had provided the ram for the sacrifice
in Abraham's day,
so now there must be a sacrifice in David's day.

In verse 16 we hear:

*¹⁶And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven,
and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem.*

This is a striking statement!
The sword of the LORD hangs over Jerusalem.
Will the city of David fall?

*Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. ¹⁷And David said to God,
"Was it not I who gave command to number the people? It is I who have sinned and done great
evil. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand, O LORD my God, be against*

me and against my father's house. But do not let the plague be on your people."

Note that David offers to take the curse upon himself.

"let your hand be against me and against my father's house."

*Let me and my father's house be wiped out – and destroyed from the face of the earth –
so that my people may live!*

The angel then commanded Gad to tell David to go build an altar at the threshing floor of Ornan.

d. The Threshing Floor of Ornan and the End of the Plague (v18-27)

¹⁸Now the angel of the LORD had commanded Gad to say to David that David should go up and raise an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. ¹⁹So David went up at Gad's word, which he had spoken in the name of the LORD. ²⁰Now Ornan was threshing wheat. He turned and saw the angel, and his four sons who were with him hid themselves. ²¹As David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David and went out from the threshing floor and paid homage to David with his face to the ground. ²²And David said to Ornan, "Give me the site of the threshing floor that I may build on it an altar to the LORD—give it to me at its full price—that the plague may be averted from the people." ²³Then Ornan said to David, "Take it, and let my lord the king do what seems good to him. See, I give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for the wood and the wheat for a grain offering; I give it all." ²⁴But King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing." ²⁵So David paid Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the site. ²⁶And David built there an altar to the LORD and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering. ²⁷Then the LORD commanded the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath.

Apparently Ornan also had seen the angel of death – and so he and his sons hid themselves.

Then they see David the king – and so Ornan bows before him.

Ornan offers the threshing floor, the oxen, and the wood and the wheat –

"I give it all!"

Who is Ornan?

Ornan is a Jebusite!

He belongs to one of the Canaanite peoples who was under the ban –
and yet he has humbled himself before the LORD's anointed.

But David will not accept all this as a gift.

*"I will not take for the LORD what is yours,
nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing."*

And so David pays an exorbitant price (600 shekels of gold) for the site.

But the price is of little importance

compared with the importance of the place.

Because there David built an altar to the LORD
and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the LORD,
and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven.

God's presence – his Spirit – the fire from heaven –
had come at the threshing floor of Ornan.

Only then does the angel sheath his sword.

Trinity Hymnal, #420, has a great line,
“Where the paschal blood is poured, death's dark angel sheathes his sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go through the wave that drowns the foe.
Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, paschal victim, paschal bread;
with sincerity and love eat we manna from above.

The original referent was the sheathing of the sword of the Angel in Egypt
during the original Passover.

But now the Angel of Death has come upon Israel.
Now the Angel of Death has come to Jerusalem.
Jerusalem is about to perish for the sin of her king.

But the blood of the sacrifice atones for sin.

Abraham had learned the principle of substitution
when he was on Mount Moriah.
David here learns the importance of the atoning sacrifice that removes sin.
He offers to take the penalty of the curse upon himself.
And God then commands him to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings.

There will come a day when the Seed of Abraham – the Son of David –
will come to Mount Moriah and fulfill all that his fathers had done.

In Abraham's day a ram sufficed.
In David's day it was burnt offerings and peace offerings.

But in that day, all types vanished and every shadow fled,
as the Word who had become flesh –
the eternal Son of God who had taken our mortality upon himself
fell before the destroying angel.

There once again standing between earth and heaven,
he looked out over Jerusalem –

and rather than strike down the city,
he offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sin.

And as God did what Abraham was willing to do –
in offering his son as the sacrifice –
the Son of God did what David was willing to do –
in bearing the penalty of the curse upon himself.

Some people have read the parallel between the story of Abraham and Isaac
and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross,
and they only see a story of cosmic child abuse.

They forget that in Trinitarian theology
the Son of God is equal with the Father –
the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

The Son did not go unwillingly to the cross.

But they also neglect the story of the threshing floor of Ornan –
where the anointed king offered himself in place of his people!

e. The Tabernacle and the Altar (21:28-22:1)

²⁸At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. ²⁹For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon, ³⁰but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

It appears from verses 28-30
that David had been on his way to Gibeon to inquire of the LORD at the tabernacle –
but the sword of the LORD prevented him.

Therefore David would not go up to Gibeon any more.
As verse 1 of chapter 22 says,

¹Then David said, "Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel."

In other words,
the one sin that David commits in the book of Chronicles
results in the location of the temple!
Perhaps it is a strange way for the location to be decided –
but in another way it is quite fitting!

The purpose of the temple, after all, is to remove sin
and restore the people of God to a right relation with God.

What better place than the place where David's one sin was atoned for?
(I know that David committed *other* sins!
But *Chronicles* only speaks of this one).

Chapter 22 then speaks of the preparations for the house of the LORD.

God had said in chapter 17 that David would not build the house of the LORD –
but that did not mean that David could not prepare for the house of the LORD!

2. Preparations for the House of the LORD (22:2 – 22:19)

a. David Gathers Materials (v2-5)

And so David started by gathering craftsmen and materials (v2-5).

²David commanded to gather together the resident aliens who were in the land of Israel, and he set stonecutters to prepare dressed stones for building the house of God. ³David also provided great quantities of iron for nails for the doors of the gates and for clamps, as well as bronze in quantities beyond weighing, ⁴and cedar timbers without number, for the Sidonians and Tyrians brought great quantities of cedar to David. ⁵For David said, "Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands. I will therefore make preparation for it." So David provided materials in great quantity before his death.

b. David's Charge to Solomon (v6-16)

i. You Are God's Son – the Man of Rest (v6-10)

Since Solomon was young and inexperienced,

David took it upon himself to make sure that everything was ready for him.

And then (verse 6) he charged Solomon "to build a house for the LORD."

He tells him the story of 1 Chronicles 17:

⁶Then he called for Solomon his son and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁷David said to Solomon, "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house to the name of the LORD my God. ⁸But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. ⁹Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. ¹⁰He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.'

This is the proclamation of the gospel –
the good news of the kingdom of God.

God will establish the royal throne of the Son of David forever.

Solomon – the man of peace – through whom God will give peace and quiet to all his people –
he will build a house for my name.

And God will adopt Solomon – the Son of David – as his own son.

And this kingdom will last forever.

ii. So May the LORD Be with You and Grant You Wisdom to Observe the Law of Moses and Become the New Joshua (v11-16)

In verses 11-16, David turns to the exhortation.

The first point (and the last point) is “may the LORD be with you!”

The presence of the LORD with his anointed is absolutely essential.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

The converse is also true:

If God is against us, who can be for us?

Notice also that David reminds Solomon of God’s promise:

“so that you may succeed in building the house of the LORD your God,
as he has spoken concerning you.”

David understands that just because God has promised
does not mean that therefore you can just sit back and relax
and wait for God to fulfill his word!

No – even as you pray diligently that God will fulfill his word,
you must work diligently to do what God has commanded (read v12-13)

¹¹“Now, my son, the LORD be with you, so that you may succeed in building the house of the LORD your God, as he has spoken concerning you. ¹² Only, may the LORD grant you discretion and understanding, that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep the law of the LORD your God. ¹³ Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the rules that the LORD commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Fear not; do not be dismayed. ¹⁴With great pains I have provided for the house of the LORD 100,000 talents of gold, a million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond weighing, for there is so much of it; timber and stone, too, I have provided. To these you must add. ¹⁵You have an abundance of workmen: stonecutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of craftsmen without number, skilled in working ¹⁶gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Arise and work! The LORD be with you!”

David’s exhortation to Solomon sounds a great deal like Moses’ exhortation to Joshua.

“Be strong and courageous” is the key phrase in Moses’ exhortation.

Moses had always wanted to lead Israel into the land.

But God said that he would die outside the land,
and so Moses was only able to prepare the way for Joshua;
to provide the legal system – the statutes and the rules
by which Israel was to live in the land.

Even so, now David had always wanted to build a temple.

But God said that he could not,
and so David was only able to prepare the way for Solomon;
to provide the building materials and financing
by which Israel was to build the temple.

I want you to see the pattern:

Moses and Joshua are all about Israel and the Land
David and Solomon are all about the King and the Temple.

But there is a parallel between them.

The Holy Seed and the Holy Place are connected.

With Moses and Joshua you have the whole people of God living in the land.
With David and Solomon you have the king in Jerusalem with the temple.

There is a narrowing

from all Israel to the house of David to Jesus
and from the land to the temple to Jesus.

Because Jesus is both the King and the Temple.

Jesus is both the holy seed and the holy place.
He is the place where earth and heaven meet.

And in Christ, you have become a holy seed – and a holy temple –
a holy dwelling place of the Spirit.

And you also see this connection between the Seed and the people
in David's charge to the elders:

c. David's Charge to the Leaders of Israel: Seek the LORD and Build the House (v17-19)

¹⁷David also commanded all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, ¹⁸"Is not the LORD your God with you? And has he not given you peace on every side? For he has delivered the inhabitants of the land into my hand, and the land is subdued before the LORD and his people. ¹⁹Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God. Arise and build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the holy vessels of God may be brought into a house built for the name of the LORD."

Again, here is the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom:

The LORD has delivered the inhabitants of the land into the hand of the king,
and has given peace to his people.

That is what God has done in the Christ – the Anointed One.

And so therefore the people of the Anointed One (the Christians)
are to build the sanctuary of the LORD.

As we saw last week,

when the LORD's Anointed slays giants,

the people of the LORD's Anointed also slay giants;

even so, when the LORD's Anointed – the Son of David – is on the throne,

then all the people of God "arise and build the sanctuary"

The Son of David is building a holy temple to the LORD.

Our Lord Jesus Christ *is* the temple –
but he is also building you *into* the temple –
as he unites you to himself and conforms you to his likeness.

How do you do this?

First, believe the gospel – the good news of the kingdom!
Repent of your sin – repent of your unbelief.
And then live (and speak) like you believe the gospel of the kingdom!

Believe that God will use the preaching of the gospel to accomplish his purposes!
Invite people to come to church.

You might say, “Oh, I don’t know if they would like our sort of church.”

Do you believe the good news of the kingdom?
Or do you believe in the power of marketing?

Do you know what I say when I invite people to come to church?

I say something like:
“we have a rather unusual worship service” –
“it’s not your typical church” –
“we believe that God’s Word is what really changes people;
so not only do we have the reading and preaching of the Word,
we also *sing* a lot of scripture.”

But there is also the other side of this.

Do *you* hear the Word, receive the Word, and apply and live the Word?

I cannot change you.

The Word of God – working by the Spirit of God – changes you.
Are you meditating on the Word, thinking about the Word,
asking yourself (and talking with others) about how to apply the Word?

Because, sure, I have no doubt that we could design a “church”
that would be really attractive to lots of people.

But we are called to “Arise and work”

Go do it!
Build the temple – the holy dwelling place for the name of the LORD –
the place where the Spirit of God will dwell with his people.

Arise and work!

And the LORD be with you!