

Making Sense of David's Census

2 Samuel 24:1 - 24; 1 Chronicles 21:1 - 30

Nutshell: God's dealings with Israel through David should stir the fear of God in us.

I. Context: Is 1 Kings 15:5 a good hermeneutic for David's life?

II. Text

2 Sam 24:1 And again the anger of Yahweh glowed against Israel, and He incited David against them, to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

1 Chron 21:1 And Satan stood up against Israel and he incited David to number Israel.

Literal Standard Version with modifications

The next four outline items, III. - VI., are based on the 4 uses of Scripture listed in 2 Tim 3:16 AND the 3 depictions of preaching in 2 Tim 4:2.

III. Teaching

A.

Review

- A. The Book of Kingdoms, our 1 & 2 Sam + 1 & 2 Kings, is the story of Israel's kings, beginning with the prophet Samuel, who anointed both of the first two kings, Saul and David
 - 1. Samuel warned Israel vs. having a king, 1 Sam 10:19, Hos 13:11
 - 2. **Saul** demonstrated *man's* kind of rule. God previewed *His* version of king through **David**, 1 Sam 13:14
- ✳ B. 1 Kings 15:5 says David kept God's commands *except* in the Bathsheba incident. This provides a 'game-changer' hermeneutic.
- C. David was God's chosen king, a *picture* of Messiah, but *not* the Messiah; a *reference point* for later kings of Judah, 2 Kings 14:3
 - 1. David was anointed king over **Judah**, 2 Sam 2, then **Israel**, 5:1-5.
 - 2. Trouble between the two begins in 2 Sam 2:12-32.
- D. **DAVID'S WAITING BUSINESS AS KING***
 - 1. Conquer Jebus (Jerusalem), where Goliath's head was, 1 Sam 17:54
 - 2. Retrieved the Ark from its 'wanderings', 6:1-19;

- tragically wrongly, 1 Chron 15:2; then rightly & joyfully
3. Build a permanent form for the Tabernacle, the Temple.
 - ★ 4. God chose **Abraham** to bless all nations. Now He chose **David**'s line to bring forth the King of all nations
 5. 1 Sam 20:14 oath in 2 Sam 9. *OBLIGATIONS CAUGHT UP.
- E. David's sin and its consequences
1. David murdered to cover adultery, Ch 11. Now David, though forgiven, *would see continued violence*, ch 12
 2. David's son died, *not*, per Deut 24:16, as a cohort. He was 'replaced' by Solomon/ Jediah, "adored" by God.
- F. Chap 13, Amnon deceived everyone and raped his half-sister Tamar
1. Tamar's brother Absalom counseled her to keep quiet on the matter (declining legal recourse?)
 2. He awaited his opportunity and killed Amnon, then fled to his grandad, king in Geshur
- G. *Today, we'll consider David's confession of 'another' great sin, besides the one listed in 1 Kings 15:5. Assuming no inconsistency between the two, how are they reconciled?*

Outline:

- I. Review of Our Five Main Points
 - II. 2 Sam 24, God Angry at Israel Again
 - A. 2 Sam 21 the probable former occasion
 - B. 2 Sam 21-14 a unit
 - III. God Incites David Against Israel
 - A. Using Satan, 1 Chron 21
 - B. Inciting by withholding His upholding Spirit to some extent
 - IV. David Unaware of Israel's Sin
 - V. How the Census was Sin
 - VI. David Makes an Offering for Israel
- H. **So far**, we concluded (with help from commentators) that:
1. *Firstly*, "we all stumble in many ways," Jms 3:2a, including the "blameless," Jms 3:2b
 - a. (It's hard not to envision God's assessment of us as lenient- right up to but not crossing the line of inaccuracy!
 - b. That is, where I see my own slip (stumble) as

intolerable, God may make greater allowance, defining the boundary line of transgression as somewhere beyond my stumble

- c. It comes back to this: It's *not* how you or I see our own or one another's failings, it's how God defines them
- d. Is it built into God's mercy that He chooses the *outermost* line as His definition of wrongdoing? With all the factors rightly involved, does He purposely (mercifully) align them to give us the most slack (again, short of transgression)?
- e. Other factors play into it, no doubt. Missteps mounting up, *turning into* presumption automatically...?
- f. So is one lesson of 1 Kings 15:5 compared to David's real-time record that God's commands are not as stern as we might at first read into them?)
- g. David stumbled, as all do, fell hard once and paid for it dearly

Kid-speak: Does the Bible say that all Christians trip? Yes. What does that mean? It means that it's hard for our **hearts** to walk straight (stay pure) and keep our balance.

2. *Secondly*, 1 Kings 15:5 is a *commendation*
 - a. Saying that David sinned a lot does not align with 1 Kings 15:5, yet that is the common view today
 - b. God sought a man "for Himself, according to His heart" and found David. Yet David sinned at every turn?? No.
3. *Thirdly*, reading *false witness* into 1 Sam 21 is the critical fork in the road. Our examination showed us that:
 - a. David's purposeful misinformation in 1 Samuel 21 only made sense as a scheme to protect Ahimelech
 - b. The Law on false witness shows the Hebrew midwives being blessed for purposeful, life-saving misinformation
 - c. The Ninth Word focuses on Justice, not factuality
 - d. Prov 14:25 clarifies this ↑ if we hadn't gotten it yet
 - e. *God commanded* misinformation in several passages
 - f. *Several* people gave righteous misinformation
 - g. Jesus spoke approvingly of David in the 1 Sam 21 affair
4. *Last time*, we compared the record of the good kings of Judah, those who "did uprightly in the eyes of Yahweh"
 - a. David's exception was listed in his evaluation, long after

- his reign
- b. The 8 other good kings' "upright" assessments were at the *beginnings* of their reigns. Any failings, it seems, came toward the *end* of their reigns.
 - c. Therefore, their uprightness was true at first and until the end, and hence, generally true
5. *Lastly*, David alone has the phrase "all the days of his life"
- a. We found 1 Chron 17:3 helpful, dividing David's life into a *former*, better part of his walk, thereby implying a worse *latter* part of his life
 - b. Worse, but still "not turning aside from all God commanded him."
 - c. This problem period, after Bathsheba, was characterized by indecision

Kid-speak: The Bible says King David only messed up bad once. But was he better in the first part of his life? Yes.

- I. Now today, we hope to close out our examination of 1 Kings 15:5 by answering how David ordering a census in 2 Sam 24 squares with his uprightness all the days of his life
- J. 2 Sam 24:1
 1. "Again" is a key word
 - a. God had been angry with them previously
 - b. That occasion seems to have been 2 Sam 21, a famine alerting them to God's displeasure
 2. 2 Sam 21-24 is a recognizable unit in the whole story, doing some chronological rewinding for thematic purposes
 3. 2 Sam 21 is a difficult passage in its own right
 - a. But there, the potential inconsistency is in God Himself. How could He accept the death of children on behalf of a father's (Saul's) sin?
 - b. If there were any conflicts with the Torah, David would have known it. There apparently weren't.
 - c. The easiest explanation is that Saul's descendants were somehow participants in Saul's unjust killing of the Gibeonites (the real-time act isn't recorded)
 - d. Their simplest participation would have been profiting from or settling on the absconded land
 - e. We have clearer grounds for inferred guilt with Achan's family in Joshua 7, but neither is it stated outright

- f. But 2 Sam 21 for later
- 4. Why is 2 Sam 24 put last in the book, even though earlier chapters occurred later?
 - a. *Because* its end segues to Israel's further chronicles by providing the site for the *Temple's* building
 - b. And it's the census incident that brings us up to that point. Israel sinning leading to Israel's Temple.

K. "The anger of Yahweh glowed against Israel"

- 1. My main case for not reading this passage in terms of David turning aside from Yahweh's commands is that it was God's anger "against *Israel*," not against David
- 2. In the 2 Sam 21 incident, a previous deed of *Saul* needed restitution
 - a. Here, no previous deed of David comes into play
 - b. Rather, God "incites" *David* to do wrong here in order to punish *Israel*

Kid-speak: Who was God mad at in 2 Samuel 24? Israel. Had they done something wrong? Yes.

L. "And He incited David against them"

- 1. Further evidence that David was not the original perpetrator: "against them"
 - a. Remember that in our comparison of the good kings, some were carefully distinguished from "the people," especially in building high places
 - b. But, yes, 'the buck stops' with the leader
- 2. Several commentators note that the point of *both* 2 Sam 21 & 24 is to present David as **DELIVERER** from God's just wrath
 - a. A clear type-of-Christ presentation
 - b. So could his "I have sinned greatly" (v 17) even been part of that picture? Christ "became sin" for us.
 - c. God **put** David in that situation to provide a picture for what the Ideal King and Messiah would do and be...?

M. "He incited David"

- 1. A theological difficulty, but not the same as in 2 Sam 21
 - a. Jms 1:13 says God "tempts no one"
 - b. That apparently means that He doesn't 'flip the switch' that chooses sin in our heart

2. Jms 1:14 clarifies that any wrongful desire is a product of ourselves

N. “Incited,” Heb., *suth*, 18x

1. Deut 13:6, a friend “inciting” idolatry
2. Josh 15:18, Achsah “persuades” her husband to ask her dad for a piece of land
3. Jer 43:3, Accusing Baruch of “setting a trap” for them
4. 2 Chron 18:31, God “inclining” the Syrians not to chase Jehoshaphat
5. Job 2:3, God saying Satan “moved” *Him* against Job!
6. Job 36:16, 18, 2 opposite uses in the same argument
7. 1 Sam 26:19, David to Saul, If God “stirred you up” against me, let Him accept an offering:
 - a. So God stirring to justice (for the sake of argument)
 - b. Perhaps this v holds a key, since God *does* accept an offering in our passage

Kid-speak: It says that God made it easier for David to do something he shouldn’t have done. But did God make David do wrong? No.

O. “Incited” in 1 Chron 21:1

1. Same event, but Satan “incited” (same word) David to number Israel
 - a. Satan, Heb. *satan*, enemy.
 - b. *satan* without the article, but taking it as “an enemy” (human) makes little sense
2. Long-story-short: God ‘used’ Satan to incite David
 - a. (God, e.g., used Satan in 2 Cor 12:7)
 - b. Since Satan’s incitement is recorded independently, *he* may have brought the report of Israel’s sin to God 1st
 - c. But God, of course, knew Israel’s sin and apparently acted on His own initiative, *not* answering Satan’s accusation
 - d. OR Satan came into it afterwards, as in 2 Chron 18:21
3. BY WHAT MEANS would God incite David through Satan?
 - a. Perhaps inhibiting God’s gracious influences in David
 - b. Counteracting 1 Sam 16:13
 - c. OR in the manner of 2 Chron 32:31, “withdrew”

Kid-speak: The Devil tries to make us do bad things. Can God use that for our good? Yes.

P. “Yahweh... Israel... David... them”

1. *A king's decisions become the people's lives*
2. But the people's decisions become the leader's responsibility
3. To get to the people, the natural tool was David
 - a. That's the way kings and their people work
 - b. Kingship, rightly understood, is more of a burden than a privilege
4. Jesus as our King takes on our burdens
 - a. But He is the first king who can *change* his people in taking their burden
 - b. But until the change is complete, the Spirit is herding cats

Q. 2 Sam 24:17, “I have sinned... these, the flock, what have they done?” shows that David did not know (at the time) the people's sin that God was judging

1. As he hadn't known about God's 'bookkeeping' with Saul in chap 21 until it was revealed
2. It was disclosed to the chronicler, presumably after the fact
- ☞ 3. David is *WRONG* IN HIS ASSUMPTION THAT THEY *HADN'T* SINNED; perhaps he is wrong (at least in some way or degree) in the assessment that he *had* sinned
4. Something like Job 3:25, “What I feared has come to me”
 - a. We know Job had not sinfully feared, Job 1:8
 - b. But he counted his present gloom towards his past qualms (having wondered how the prosperity could last)

Kid-speak: What is David mainly doing in our story today?
Asking God to forgive the people of Israel.

R. On the “technical” side of things, where is the command not to take a census?

1. There was a census tax for Tabernacle upkeep, Exod 30:12 (cf. Lk 21:2, the widow's two mites)
2. The book of Numbers contains a big census
3. But the point seems to be that God did not order *this* census. David said, “that I may know the number,” 2 Sam 24:2
 - a. Joab recognized its unauthorized nature
 - ◆ b. 1 Chron 27:23-24 seem to indicate that God sovereignly curtailed a complete census, partly by plague and partly by Joab's intentional 'slow-walking' part of it

S. Final evidence that Israel's sin, not David's, is the real subject of God's ire: David's offering was accepted for “the land” and for

“Israel,” 2 Sam 24:25

1. Though he had specifically asked the guilt to be transferred to him and his father’s house, 1 Chron 21:17
 2. But David was not plagued, nor did he make an offering for himself and his house
 3. The chronicler seems to be, at most, ‘bundling’ David’s sin with Israel’s
- T. So, especially because of the unique circumstances, 1 Kings 15:5 doesn’t seem to count this as David “turning away” from God’s commands

IV. For the Walking Wounded (1 Thess 5:14, “Uphold the strengthless”) We see God doing some handicapping on purpose. His good intentions remain.

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V. Conviction (2 Tim 4:2, “Convince, rebuke”): **What have I done wrong? How have I lost righteousness?**  
Do I presume upon God’s gracious influences?

VI. Correction/ Realignment (2 Tim 4:2, “Exhort/encourage”):  
**How will I correct my error? How will I regain uprightness?**  
I will turn God’s testings into greater calls of reliance on Him.

VII. Schooling in Righteousness: **How will I avoid the error and follow Christ?**  
“Father, You will not abandon me, though You test me.”

Vision: The theological difficulties of 2 Samuel 21 and 24 are the kind that give us pause, but especially 2 Samuel 24. Would God withdraw His Spirit’s gracious influences from us to test us? With David, there was an automatic tie to his people. But would God simply test us to see our heart fully, a la 2 Chron 32:31?

If He did, it would be temporary. He’ll “never, no never, no never forsake” those for whom Christ died. (Five negatives in Heb 13:5 reflected in the hymn “How Firm a Foundation.”)