

THE NUMBERING OF ISRAEL

Introduction:

1. This chapter begins with the word “again.”
2. This links it back to chapter 21 and the punishment of God by sending a famine in Israel.
3. However, the exact time when the events of this chapter occurred is not know with certainty.
4. Considering that it must have happened during a time of peace, there are two likely possibilities.
 - a. Following the events of chapter 9, earlier in David’s reign
 - b. After the rebellion of Absalom and David’s return to the throne
5. In this study, we will assume the latter timeframe.

- I. The Command of David (2 Samuel 24:1-4)
 - A. It must be noted and emphasized that God’s anger was kindled against Israel.
 1. The nation had sinned.
 2. They deserved discipline and punishment and God was working to accomplish this.
 - B. Thus, God moved David against Israel and he commanded that the nation should be numbered.
 1. This does not mean that God tempted David to sin.
 2. In fact, 1 Chronicles 21:1 states that Satan (an adversary [no article]) provoked David to number Israel.
 3. It was the devil who tempted David; God merely allowed it to happen and then used it to accomplish His purpose (cf. James 1:13-14).
 - C. Why was it a sin to number the people of Israel?
 1. David had counted his men before going into battle (18:1).
 2. Moses had numbered the people of Israel twice (Numbers 1, 26).
 3. Here it seems that the sin was one of presumption – David acted without seeking God’s will (cf. 1 Chron. 21:3).
 4. His persistence in this matter may have been strengthened by Joab’s response.
 - D. David’s will prevailed and Joab set out to number the nation.
- II. The Numbering of Israel (2 Samuel 24:5-9)
 - A. A circular path – across the Jordan, north, then west, then south, then east back to Jerusalem
 - B. It took 9 months and 20 days.
 - C. The total number was 1.3 million men of fighting age. *{The account in Chronicles (21:5-6) seems to give round numbers and does not count Levi or Benjamin.}*
- III. The Repentance of David (2 Samuel 24:10-19)
 - A. After accomplishing this work, David’s heart smote him.
 1. The heart refers to the mind or soul of man.
 2. It includes the emotions and the conscience of man.
 3. Thus, David came to realize that he had sinned and it affected his emotions and his will.
 - B. David confessed his wrong to God (cf. 1John 1:9; Jam. 5:16).

2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21

- C. David asked God for forgiveness of his transgression (cf. Acts 8:22-24).
 - D. The next morning, the prophet Gad came to David to reveal a message from Jehovah.
 - E. The sin in Israel had to be punished and David was to choose the form it would take:
 - 1. Seven years of famine in the land
 - 2. Three months of David fleeing from his enemies
 - 3. Or, three days pestilence in the land
 - F. Remember that this is punishment for the nation's sins (vs. 1), not David's alone.
 - G. After careful thought, David made his choice – revealing his faith in God.
 - 1. Famine would have affected the people, but David (as King) would have been spared.
 - 2. War would have affected all, but David knew the cruelty of men and the 'unintended consequences' of war.
 - 3. Pestilence placed all at equal risk and was in the hands of God.
 - H. Because he trusted in the Lord's mercy, David chose pestilence, stating, "Let us fall now into the hand of Jehovah."
 - I. Thus, God sent a plague upon Israel from which 70,000 Israelites died.
 - J. The plague began in the morning and continued until the "appointed time."
 - 1. It may be that this refers to the three days (vs. 13); however, it seems that God shortened the time of the plague due to His mercy (vs. 16).
 - 2. It may simply refer to the time appointed by God to end the plague.
 - 3. Or, it may refer to the time of the assembly – meaning, the evening sacrifice.
 - 4. If so, it seems that God shortened the time of the plague to less than one day – truly an act of mercy!
 - K. David became aware of the plague when he saw the angel of the Lord approaching the city of Jerusalem with his sword drawn for destruction.
 - 1. It is probable that David thought the plague was just beginning.
 - 2. In fact, merciful God stated, "It is enough."
 - L. David's reaction was to beg for mercy, taking all the blame for himself and seeking to spare the 'innocent' sheep from suffering.
 - M. God responded by sending Gad the prophet to instruct David to build an altar at the threshing-floor of Araunah.
- IV. The Altar of Jehovah (2 Samuel 24:20-25)
- A. God allowed Araunah (also called Ornan) to see the approaching angel of destruction, leading him and his sons to hide in fear (1 Chron. 21:20).
 - B. Soon, he saw the King approaching and ran out to meet him.
 - C. David asked to buy his threshing-floor to build there an altar to Jehovah.
 - D. Araunah offered to give David the land as well as oxen, wheat, and his tools to be used as wood for the altar fire.
 - E. David demanded that Araunah be paid for what he offered; for, the King would not offer to God that which cost him nothing.
 - F. Thus, David built an altar and offered both burnt offerings and peace offerings which God accepted, showing His approval by sending fire from heaven.
 - 1. This altar was built in the location where the Temple would be erected.
 - 2. God had chosen this place as the location for His dwelling among the people of Israel.
 - G. So, the plague in Israel ended.