

2 Samuel 24. Augusta. 6 November 2011.

Those here last Lord's Day will know that over these two weeks in the Bible Class we are considering the closing section of the Second Book of Samuel, or, more particularly, the first and last chapters of that section. Last week we looked at 2 Samuel 21. And so, as you will guess, our reading for this morning consists of chapter 24.

[**READ 2 Samuel 24.** At verse 13 ... 'For what it is worth, I think this should read 'three years', which is in line with both the Septuagint rendering here and, more importantly, with the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21 verse 12.¹]

Although we didn't read it, chapter 23 closed with a reminder of one of David's great sins. Chapter 24 records another.

At the opening of the chapter we are told that God's wrath was kindled, and at the close that it was appeased. David has dealings with God throughout the chapter. But, for convenience, I want to divide the chapter into three sections, each headed by reference to the three main human characters with whom David had dealings ... Joab in verses 1 to 9; Gad in verses 10 to 17, and Araunah (or Ornan, as in 1 Chron. 21) in verses 18 to 25.

David's sin is the subject of the first section, which opens with the command to take a census of 'Israel and Judah', and closes with a report of the total number of fighting men 'in Israel ... and in Judah'.

David's confession is the subject of verses 10 to 17 at the beginning of which 'David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned', and at the end of which he confessed again, 'I have sinned'.

David's altar is the subject of verses 18 to 25, which opens with Gad's command to 'rear an altar to the Lord in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite', and closes with David building 'an altar there to the Lord'.

Verse 1 opens with the ominous note that 'again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel' – the 'again' connecting, no doubt, back to the events recorded in chapter 21. As we noted last week, the evidence is that the events of chapter 21 took place early on in David's reign. Whereas an action which occupied all Israel's military commanders for almost ten months could only have been undertaken in a time of settled peace, such as followed the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. And so we learn again – from David's sin and folly here – that no one, however advanced in life and experience, is beyond the possibility of falling. 'Let him who thinks he stands ...'.

Note please that the action starts with God's anger directed, not at David, but against Israel. In chapter 21, God's wrath against Israel was occasioned by a sin of its earlier monarch. But here it is God's wrath against His people which provides the occasion for a sin by its present monarch.

We are not told explicitly what it was which roused God's anger against the nation. Although, given the known character of our God, we can safely assume that there was some transgression which had provoked this particular response – just as, for example, there had been years before in the case of Uzzah, recorded in chapter 6.

As we shall see, the Lord later offered David one of three judgements, each of which would affect the people in general and each of which He (the Lord) had spoken of elsewhere as punishments which would follow Israel's breach of His covenant. Personally, I suspect that God was angry with them because, in past days, they had rejected His anointed king, David – and in so doing rejected Himself – in favour of Absalom, and, in the case of the northern tribes at least, in favour of Sheba.

So, when we read later of the pestilence which fell on Israel, we need to keep in mind that, although its direct and immediate cause was the sin of David, the pestilence was in reality the Lord's judgement upon Israel for their own sin.

One scholar has detected 'three great external calamities' in David's reign ... a three years' famine in its early days, a three months' exile during its middle period, and a three days' pestilence near its close.²

'The Lord moved ('prompted') David', we read. Yet the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21 ascribes the action to Satan, who, we read, 'stood up' – presumably to accuse Israel ... and I have my eye on what Zechariah says of him in the opening verse of his third chapter ... and who prompted David to number Israel.

Clearly in these two accounts the Holy Spirit views the same incident from two distinct angles. The full story seems to be that it was Satan who directly tempted and instigated David to do that which was seen, not only by Joab as both senseless and unnecessary, but by David himself as both sinful and foolish, and, more significantly, by God as both serious and punishable ... but that the Lord permitted Satan to do this – and through David's action to accomplish His (God's) own purposes – in this case of both chastising His people for their sin, and of later identifying the location which He had chosen as the site for His temple.³

Joni expressed it far better than I ever could, 'God often permits the things which He hates to accomplish the things which He loves'.

Not, of course, that it is unusual for God, in His sovereignty, to over-rule the devil's activities to further His (God's) own purpose. We know well that passage in 2 Corinthians 12 where Paul spoke of a time, then 14 years earlier, when 'a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me'⁴ – the thorn clearly being some affliction intended by the devil to harass the apostle and to hamper his work for the Lord.

But, under the good hand of God, as the apostle could see with hindsight, his thorn in the flesh had kept him humble those fourteen years before – 'lest', as he now wrote, 'I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations' – and thereby maintained him in a condition of soul in which God could continue to use him – that very thorn being used by the Lord to prick the balloon of this converted Pharisee's pride.⁵

And when here in 2 Samuel 24 the text says that God did, that which in practice, He permitted Satan to do, it is not that dissimilar to the case of Job, who, having lost all his possessions and children courtesy of the devil's operations, is on record as having said, not 'Satan has taken away', but 'the Lord has taken away'.⁶

The census which David ordered was one of six major censuses mentioned in Scripture.⁷

Personally, I enjoy the story told of a census officer here in the United States.... 'An old farmer', the story runs, 'was sitting on his porch, when a stranger walked up with a pad and pencil in his hand. "What can I do for you?" the old man politely asked. "You selling something?"

"No, sir, I'm not. I'm a Census Official".

"A what?"

"A Census Official. We're trying to find out how many people are in the United States".

"Well, you're wasting your time here. I've no idea".

But the census conducted by David was very different to that census. David wasn't interested in knowing the population of his kingdom.⁸ His was a military census, aimed at assessing the size and strength, not of his standing army – which was well-known – but of the potential fighting force of his entire realm, in the event of a national call-up.

The Holy Spirit has made it clear that this was such a census, by informing us (i) that David entrusted it to his army commanders, (ii) by making it clear that the results were in terms of those who 'drew sword', and (iii) by using a word (translated 'number') in verses 2 and 4 which is often used of mustering troops in preparation for battle. It is perhaps significant also (iv) that, both in 2 Samuel and in 1 Chronicles, this narrative follows the listing of David's mighty men.

As a military census, it had much in common with those conducted by Moses in Numbers chapter 1 and in Numbers chapter 26. On both of those occasions Moses numbered the male Israelites from twenty years old and upwards – 'all that were able to go forth to war'.

That David's interest was military is confirmed by the fact that, according to 1 Chronicles 27 verse 23, like Moses, he 'took not the number of them from twenty years old and under'.

But given that there was more than one sound historical precedent for a military survey in Israel, where, we may well ask, did David's sin lie?

Indeed, according to chapter 18 of this very book, David himself had previously 'numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them'.⁹

I guess that part at least of the answer lies in that each of the other surveys had been occasioned by specific needs. In Moses' case, apart from the fact that, on both occasions, he had been commanded to muster Israel's troops by the Lord Himself, he had done so first in preparation for an invasion of Canaan from Kadesh Barnea, and then later in preparation for Joshua's invasion from the east and as a basis for later apportioning the land of Canaan.¹⁰ In David's own case in chapter 18, he had been compelled to muster his fighting force on account of Absalom's revolt.

But now there no circumstances which necessitated such a course. So what was David's motivation? It is possible, I suppose, that, following the rebellions of both Absalom and Sheba, he may have thought it prudent to reassess his military situation against the possibility of similar uprisings.¹¹ But if so, it was ironic that, as we noted earlier, it may well have been Israel's involvement in these very uprisings which accounted for the Lord's permitting Satan to tempt David to do that very thing. And in any case a country-wide census for such a purpose would have achieved little, for David would have had no way of knowing what proportion of the men of fighting age would have thrown in their lot with any would-be usurper.

Personally, I see no mileage in the suggestion made by Josephus – and repeated by several commentators – that David's sin arose because he had failed to arrange for the collection of the atonement money while the census was being conducted, as required by God in connection with the first census conducted by Moses.¹² I note that Joab's objection was one of principle, not of detail, and that at no time did the Lord suggest to David later that he make amends for his sin by then arranging for such a collection.

As far as I can see, we are really down to David either contemplating some military campaign – without any word of direction from God – or, more likely – to him simply wanting to glory in the size of his potential fighting force. In one word – and it is an ugly word – it was a matter of pride! But in either case this came down to David putting his trust, not, as in his earlier days, in God, but in what one of David's descendants once labelled 'the arm of flesh'.¹³

And how sad it is that the same man who, not only had once faced the Philistine champion with only a sling and a few pebbles, but who, according to only two chapters back, had asserted his trust in God as his Rock, fortress and deliverer,¹⁴ that this same man should now look to the size of his army for his confidence ... should now stoop to walking by sight and not by faith. (Are you listening, Malcolm?)

But for David to put his trust in his military might rather than in his glorious God was as unnecessary as it was unwise. And he, of all people, should have known better. For we know that David was well aware of the history of Gideon in the book of Judges. And had not God once explained to Gideon, before whittling down his forces from 32,000 to a mere 300, then to face an army 450 times their own, 'The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me'?¹⁵ And had not David's close friend of earlier days, Jonathan, once gone on record as having said that 'there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few'.¹⁶

Alas for David, it does seem that at this juncture his heart had, to some extent, turned 'away from the Lord'.¹⁷ And it does seem that at the root lay his pride and vainglory. And I cannot help but think of the words of the apostle John in First John 2¹⁸ ... we could say I guess that, back in chapter 11, David had fallen prey to the 'lusts' – the 'desires' – of both 'the flesh' and of 'the eyes'¹⁹ ... now perhaps we could say that he has fallen prey to 'the pride of life' – to pride in external circumstances, as I understand John to mean.

And certainly David's 'external circumstances' were now comfortable ... there was no running now from Saul or Absalom! And, as many of us know only too well, such affluence brings its own dangers. With hindsight, David could see this for himself. It seems clear that he wrote Psalm 30 around the time when he bought the area around Araunah's threshing-floor to be the site of the future Temple.²⁰ Note the relevance of verse 6 in particular, 'I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved'. How easy in times of prosperity to become self-sufficient and to rely on our own resources.

I feel sure that, having penned that verse, and knowing that the quote is based on the words of a song once sung to commemorate his 'stunning' victory over Goliath, David would have appreciated the words of the English Puritan Thomas Brooks, 'Adversity has slain her thousand, but prosperity her ten thousand'.

There was nothing wrong, of course, in David *having* troops – whether in his standing army or available in time of crisis. That is why he had a Joab and his army commanders. There was nothing wrong in having good troops ... in having the very best of troops. What was wrong was trusting in them, rather than in his God!

And it is only right that in our service for God, we have our methods, our strategies and our aids – all fine in their place – but we must continually examine our hearts as to whether we may be guilty of sometimes putting more trust in these than in our God!²¹

David told Joab and the army commanders to 'go through' the land 'from Dan to Beersheba', an expression commonly used to describe the territory of Israel from its northern to its southern extremity, a distance of some 150 miles. In practice, they chose to cross the Jordan, proceed north, then west, and then south again, covering the land in an anticlockwise direction.

Although the text says that they went through 'all the land', we know from 1 Chronicles 21 that Joab deliberately excluded the tribes of Levi and Benjamin from his survey. The fact that 1 Chronicles 21 verse 6 draws attention to Joab's exclusion of Levi may suggest that David had commissioned him to include all the tribes, including that of Levi – in total disregard for God's law which explicitly excluded that tribe from a military census!²² If that is so, it is yet another indication of David's low spiritual condition at the time.

For reasons not given, the tribe of Benjamin was not numbered either – perhaps because, given the route followed, the territory of Benjamin was the last to be travelled – in which tribal area, of course, the terminus, Jerusalem, was situated. The Holy Spirit simply records for us that 'Joab ... began to count, but did not finish'.²³

But before setting out, Joab had registered a strong objection to David's order. But even so he expressed his unqualified support for David's rule, first by introducing his objection with a blessing and then by addressing David

three times over with due respect as 'my lord'. And he was careful to note that he was not alone in this. All of David's subjects, he observed, were loyal to David. What more could David ask? Numbering the adult males would neither increase their number nor their devotion. 'Best forget the whole idea, sir' is what David's, often ruthless, but now clear-thinking, nephew, was saying.²⁴

Just how strong Joab's opposition was to David's instruction can be gauged from the statement in 1 Chronicles 21 that 'the king's word was abominable to Joab'.²⁵ But, to his credit, having made his views clear, he went.

It was over nine months before he returned – armed with statistics which, although short of the tribe of Benjamin, recorded a result over twice that of the last national military census.²⁶ But it was only when the result was known that this nine-month 'pregnancy' of David's sin brought forth its fitting offspring – David's repentance. For only now did the King's conscience strike him.

Yet I do have to acknowledge that, although long overdue, David's confession of his sin did, unlike that following his previous great sin in chapter 11, precede the visit from God's prophet. This time, the coming of God's prophet was the result of David's repentance and not its cause.

Nor, I note, did David attempt in any way to play down his guilt. Note carefully those words, 'sinned *greatly*' and 'acted *very foolishly*'.

But, as David was soon to discover, he was not the only one to view his sin gravely. For, as we noted earlier, the Lord regarded it not only as serious but as punishable! Forgivable, yes, but to be ignored, no. And, as again we noted earlier, not one of the three options which God chose to offer David was aimed at him alone. For, in spite of the words of verse 12 'do it to you', all three had two effects: first they were each calculated to reduce the very numbers in which David trusted,²⁷ and they were calculated to act as a chastisement for the people, whose sin had been ultimately responsible for the whole episode.

And we must note David's 'let us now fall', as well as 'let me not fall', v. 14.

Having had sad experience both of severe famine and of fleeing from his foes – from Saul and, more recently, his son Absalom – it may have seemed quite natural that David should opt for the third alternative ... especially as this would fill the shortest timetable.²⁸ But neither of these was David's reason for choosing the pestilence, 'the sword of the Lord' as it is described in 1 Chronicles 21.²⁹

Following his previous great sin, David had proved that, in spite of the gravity of his sin, His God showed to him His 'many mercies'.³⁰ Armed with this knowledge, and using the very same phrase, he casts himself afresh on the Lord's 'many mercies'.

And so, if when commanding the census, David had betrayed his lack of trust in God's power, now, when selecting the chastisement, David demonstrates his trust in God's mercy. His decision to number the people may have been very foolish, but his choice of divine discipline was very wise.

And yet, in spite of God's 'merciful' shortening of the plague's duration, as verse 15 tells us, in as many hours³¹ as Joab had spent months conducting David's census for him – namely nine, no less than 70,000 died.

I still have on my computer an extract from the 'Points for Prayer' issued by Echoes of Service (the UK equivalent of CMML) over five years ago. I quote the original version which came out ... 'Over 5,000 people have been killed (1,000 of them seriously)'.³² The 'Points for Prayer' was soon corrected to read 'Over 5,000 people have been *injured* (1,000 of them seriously)!'.

But here in 2 Samuel 24, over one-twentieth of David's entire fighting force died 'seriously'. And the king who had been trusting in the power wielded by the swords of men now discovered what just one sword forged and hammered on the heavenly anvil could do!

This was the most destructive plague ever to fall on the nation. Numbers 16 records that in the plague which followed the rebellion of Korah the death toll ran to 14,700.³³ Numbers 25 records that in the plague which followed Israel's final rebellion in the wilderness when the people, seduced by the Moabites and the Midianites, engaged in sensual and idolatrous practices the death toll reached 24,000.³⁴ But here in 2 Samuel 24, the toll reached 70,000 ... over three times the number of soldiers of Absalom's army who had perished in his abortive rebellion.³⁵

No wonder that, with a dent of 70,000 knocked in them, the now-worthless census results³⁶ were never filed in the official archives!³⁷

But at this point I need to fast forward the video!³⁸ Following David's second acknowledgement of his sin³⁹ – this time being concerned not for his own well-being but for that of the nation,⁴⁰ and his 'shepherd-heart' prayer for them⁴¹ – 'smite their shepherd, but spare the flock, O Lord' – is his plea⁴² ... following his confession and prayer, he

is told by God⁴³ through the prophet Gad⁴⁴ to erect an altar at Araunah's threshing floor,⁴⁵ near the place where the plague had been arrested – where the angel of the Lord now hovered, with sword suspended, as per God's command, over the royal city. This David was quick to do, first having rejected Araunah's generous offer of donating his threshing-floor, his oxen and all his threshing instruments⁴⁶ – which were, we should note, the very means of his livelihood⁴⁷ – first having refused Araunah's generous offer, David insisted on paying the full price for all these – as he did later for the whole of the site⁴⁸ – which was, we learn elsewhere, on Mount Moriah, no less.⁴⁹

David was not in the business, he made it clear, of offering to God that which cost him nothing of seeming to honour God with another man's possessions! Had he done so, Araunah's oxen may have still been counted as David's offering. But though his offering, they would not have been his sacrifice! And how loudly David's words speak to me, as I am forced to ask myself, 'how much does my Christian life and service cost me – in terms of money, time, effort and self-denial?' Often, I speak to my shame, very, very little!

Following his offering and its dramatic acceptance by the Lord,⁵⁰ David consecrated the area as the site of the future Temple, 'the house of the Lord', and consecrated the 'altar of burnt offering' which he had built there as 'the altar of burnt offering for Israel'.⁵¹

And what great thoughts these facts arouse. For it seems, from the clear reference to Mount Moriah a little later that the angel of the Lord's sword was held back, never to fall, in the vicinity of where, one thousand years' before, a knife was suspended over Abraham's son – likewise never to fall!⁵²

But, even more significant for us, given that the Jerusalem Temple was later erected just there, both the patriarch's knife and the angel's sword were held high in the vicinity of that spot, where, one thousand years' later, a cross was raised, at which time there was no voice from heaven to call for the knife to be put away or the sword to be sheathed, but where, in contrast, the very sword of Jehovah was bidden to awake and to smite God's shepherd – our Lord Jesus.⁵³

At home we often sing the words of Mrs Cousin ...

Jehovah bade His sword awake—
O Christ, it woke 'gainst Thee!
Thy blood the flaming blade must slake;
Thy heart its sheath must be—
All for my sake, my peace to make:
*Now sleeps that sword for me.*⁵⁴

In our chapter, David pleaded for God's forgiveness, v. 10, as he had some years before following his great sins in connection with Bathsheba and Uriah.⁵⁵ And he was heard. But on what ground, pray, could God possibly put away David's sins and cleanse him from his iniquity? Ah, we know it well. Let the apostle Paul tell us once more from Romans 3, where he speaks of 'Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation (by which we mean the averting of the just wrath of God against sinners) by His blood, to be received through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins which had been committed previously'.

And so, just as in the incident we have considered this morning, the sword of judgement was suspended over a guilty people, but could only be sheathed when an acceptable offering was made ... so too Abraham and David ... and countless thousands more of God's people prior to the cross ... were, in God's forbearance, spared His wrath ... until the day came for the debt to be settled. And settled it was – in full – for them – and, praise God, for us – settled by the One whose foretold birthplace was secured for Him as a result of another – and much larger – census!⁵⁶

But that, as you know, is *another* story

Footnotes

¹ Possibly the scribe of 2 Samuel was influenced by the seven years famine in the days of Joseph, Gen. 41. 27.

² A P Stanley, Lectures on the Jewish Church, Volume 2 'Samuel to the Captivity', Lecture XXIV, page 89 ... 'Three great external calamities are recorded in David's reign, which may be regarded as marking its beginning, middle, and close. A three years' famine; a three months' exile; a three days' pestilence'.

³ 1 Chron. 22. 1.

⁴ 2 Cor. 12. 7.

⁵ I am sure Satan would have been overjoyed to rob Paul of his usefulness for God by means of Paul's spiritual pride. For Paul said later to Timothy concerning the overseer, that he must not be 'a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil'⁵ – for, yes, it had been spiritual pride which had led to the devil's own downfall at the beginning.

⁶ Job 1. 21. The Targum to 1 Chronicles 21 reads: "And Yahweh let the Satan stand up against Israel."

⁷ By Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai (Num. 1. 2–3)

By Moses in the plain of Moab (Num. 26. 2)

By David (2 Sam. 24. 1–10; 1 Chron. 21. 1–6)

By Solomon (2 Chron. 2. 17–18)

In the days of Zerubbabel and Ezra (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 8)

By Caesar Augustus (Luke 2. 1–3)

⁸ See 1 Chron. 27. 23; i.e. this was not aimed at knowing the total population in the land.

⁹ 2 Sam. 18. 1.

¹⁰ So too numbering/mustering preceded going to battle against another nation, 2 Kings 3. 5-6.

¹¹ Could rationalise ... it would afford an occasion of showing how God had blessed and prospered the people. He would be in a better position to make up any defects that might be discovered in the defences of the country. The knowledge of their unity and strength would give encouragement and confidence to men apprehensive of danger from without. The result, becoming known among neighbouring nations, would act as a check on their aggressiveness. His successor to the throne would be in possession of facts that would help his administration of affairs, and there would be some comfort in seeing how far Israel was realizing the hopes held out to their ancestors.

¹² Josephus (*Antiquities*, 7.13.1) ... 'King David was desirous to know how many ten thousands there were of the people, but forgot the commands of Moses, who told them beforehand, that if the multitude were numbered, they should pay half a shekel to God for every head'.

"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 . . . And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord to make an atonement for your souls", Exod. 30. 11-16.

¹³ 2 Chron. 32. 8.

¹⁴ 2 Sam. 22. 2-3.

¹⁵ Judges 7. 2.

¹⁶ 1 Sam. 14. 6.

¹⁷ Jer. 17. 5.

¹⁸ Verse 16.

¹⁹ 2 Sam. 11. 2, 4.

²⁰ This is still part of the Jewish liturgy recited at the Feast of Dedication, John 10. 22 – Chanukka – instituted by Maccabees to commemorate the purification and dedication of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes.

²¹ 2 Cor. 1. 9.

²² Num. 1. 49; 2. 33.

²³ 1 Chron. 27. 24.

²⁴ Joab had remonstrated with David before. See 2 Sam. 3. 23-24 (When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace." Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone?"); and 2 Sam. 19. 4-7 (The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants ...)

²⁵ 1 Chron. 21. 6.

²⁶ Num. 26. 1-2, 51 the Lord spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel. ... These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one

thousand seven hundred and thirty' Cf. 1 Chron. 21. 5. [All Israel had one million one hundred thousand men who drew the sword, and Judah had four hundred and seventy thousand men who drew the sword.]

Verse 9 refers simply to "Israel" whereas 1 Chronicles 21:5 states that the census covers "all Israel". In "Chronicles" the first sum is greater, perhaps because "the regular standing army of 288,000 (1 Chronicles 27:1-15) is included". In the record of 2 Samuel the figure for Judah is simply rounded.

²⁷ Famine, sword, and pestilence/plague were Old Testament punishments of the Lord against His sinful people (I will send the pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. When I break the staff of your bread ... Lev. 26:25–26; if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you The Lord will make the pestilence cleave to you ... The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust ... The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies ... Deut. 28:21–26; though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and cereal offering, I will not accept them; but I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. Jer. 14:12).

²⁸ Years of famine he and Israel had recently experienced. For three years had that scourge prevailed. Can understand David not wanting seven years of famine after chapter 21 verse 1!

What misery would seven years of it inflict on them all. Ask the Egyptians of old. Gen. 41. 27. During this period a Sabbatical year would fall, throughout which the land must rest, and the Nation would have to pass through it without the gracious provision of the sixth's years prolific crop. Seven years' famine would have been a heavy infliction indeed, as the history of such a scourge in the days of Joseph had made plain. Years of harassment at the hands of Saul he had experienced, and flight before Absalom he had known. 'fled' used of both. Those trials, we may be sure, were not forgotten, though they were ended; and they must have taught him of what men were capable, if allowed by God to pursue him.

²⁹ Verse 12.

³⁰ Psa. 51. 1 literally.

³¹ 'Even to time appointed' not specified but clearly shortening of time ... as no word of explanation more than likely ... The pestilence, terrible as it was in its desolations, was shortened from three days to less than one day, "from the morning to the time of the assembly," viz. for the evening sacrifice. This is the proper rendering of 2 Samuel 24:15. (Edersheim). The Hebrew may be literally rendered "till the time of appointed assembly," that is, the hour set apart for the meeting together of Israel for the evening worship. The word moed used here means both a time or place appointed for a meeting, and also the meeting itself, the right translation probably is, "From the morning even to the time of assembly,"

i.e. until time of assembly – i.e. hour of offering of evening sacrifice, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

the express statement of Jerome (traditt. Hebr. in 2 libr. Regum): "He calls that the time appointed, in which the evening sacrifice was offered.

³² Echoes' Points for Prayer 29 May 2006.

³³ Numb. 16. 48-49.

³⁴ Numb. 25. 8-9.

³⁵ 2 Sam. 18. 7.

³⁶ God now numbered to the sword, Isa. 65. 12, those whom David had numbered in his self-complacency—one twentieth (cf. v. 9) being slain.

³⁷ 1 Chron. 27. 24. Though it was David's sin that opened the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the deluge" (Matthew Henry). Also in single day ... time appointed. Cf. Sennacherib in night. power of angels be so terrible—a single one smiting with death seventy thousand Israelites in a single day – cf. 185,000 in single night.

³⁸ It seems angel follow same route as census takers. i.e. end up at Jerusalem, vv. 2, 8, with vv. 15-16. David had commanded Joab, "Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number the people" (v. 2). It will be remembered that the account of the census-taking closed by saying, "So they went through all the land, and came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.." Second, "the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it"

The appearance of the angel is described more minutely in the Chronicles: David saw him standing by the threshing-floor of Araunah between heaven and earth with a drawn sword in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem. [David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces, 1 Chron. 21. 16.] The motif of an angel with a terrifying drawn sword has biblical antecedents in the story of Balaam's ass (Num 22:23, 31) and in the story of Joshua's meeting with a man with a sword, identified as a leader in Yahweh's army (When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Josh 5:13-15). We discover from 2 Chron. 3 verse 1 that The threshing-floor of Araunah was situated, like all other threshing-floors, outside the city, and upon an eminence, or, according to the more precise statement which follows, to the north-east of Zion, upon Mount Moriah ... i.e. it was high up and therefore easily seen.

Threshing floors were on eminences to catch the wind for winnowing the grain. Moriah was to the eastward of Jerusalem.

³⁹ I have done perversely, or crookedly. David acknowledges that his conduct had not been upright and straightforward I, but that he had turned aside into the paths of self-will and personal aggrandizement.

⁴⁰ Is it not lovely to behold David here referring to Israel not as "the people" – as often – but as "your people"?

⁴¹ These sheep ... characteristic of David; all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, 2 Sam. 5. 1-2; He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand. Psa. 78. 70-72.

⁴² The meaning is: I the shepherd of Thy people have sinned and transgressed, but the nation is innocent; i.e., not indeed free from every kind of blame, but only from the sin which God was punishing by the pestilence.

⁴³ And the angel of the Lord now transformed from a minister of wrath into a minister of mercy, commanded Gad to say," etc. Now 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. (1 Chron. xxi. 18);

⁴⁴ Cf. David's contrition and Gad's direction, vv. 10-13 and vv. 17-18.

⁴⁵ The ark was then at Mount Zion. David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. 2 Sam. 5. 7; David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. 2 Sam. 6. 12. The altar associated with the tabernacle of Moses was located at Gibeon (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 1 Chr. 21:29 (Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness. 2 Chron. 1. 3), but David was bidden to go neither to the one nor the other.

⁴⁶ In opening section of chapter Joab raise objection and David over-rule, now Araunah. 'Give' can = 'sell', And 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 price⁴⁶--that the plague may be averted from the people." 1 Chron. 21. 22. cf. Gen. 23. 11. Yet clearly here means give – hence 'But King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will buy them for the full price.', 1 Chron. 21. 24. Although oxen, threshing sledges, and ox yokes constitute the materiel of his livelihood, Araunah is prepared to give them to David for a higher purpose. All these he at once gives to David, that the sacrifice may be offered without delay, as it would have cost much time and labour to bring wood up from the city.

⁴⁷ 'Ornan turned and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid themselves, but Ornan continued threshing wheat. Then David came to Ornan, and Ornan looked and saw David', 1 Chron. 21. 20-21. I.e. Araunah saw the angel before he did David. Lord dispose him to cooperate.

⁴⁸ Samuel stresses what happened – wrath appeased; Chronicles stresses where it took place because site of future temple. Naturally mentions its full cost.

⁴⁹ 2 Chron. 3. 1. Solomon built the temple on the property that David purchased for his altar. Solomon was the son of Bathsheba. What amazing grace that God could take David's two great sins and build a temple out of them! (See Rom. 5:20.) (Wiersbe, Warren W.: With the Word Bible Commentary.)

⁵⁰ The descent of fire onto the altar and consume sacrifice took place in the Old Testament only three other times (see Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar Lev. 9:23-24; As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. 2 Chr. 7:1. the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

⁵¹ 1 Chron. 22. 1. 1 and 2 Samuel begin with a debased shrine at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1–3) the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there ... Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 1Sa 2:12-14, 22; and closes with the choice of a new shrine at Jerusalem (1 Chron. 21; 22. 1). God – not David – chose place for altar ... God's choice, not David's (as was form judgement).

⁵² See 'Now it happened that Abraham came and offered his son Isaac for a burnt-offering at that very place; and ... a ram ... which Abraham sacrificed in the stead of his son', Josephus, Ant. 7. 13. 4.

⁵³ Zec 13:7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the Lord of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. Mark 14. 26-27. when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

⁵⁴ From 'O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!' (The believers' Hymn Book. Number 176.)

⁵⁵ Psa. 51. 1-2.

⁵⁶ Luke 2. 1-7.