

2 Samuel 24

Background and introduction

Before we focus on this chapter, we need to stand back and get our bearings.

2 Samuel 1-10: *Triumphs*.

Up until chapter 10 of 2 Samuel, we read of David's triumphs (political, spiritual and military) and *the growth of his kingdom*.

2 Samuel 11: *Transgressions*.

In chapter 11, we read of his transgressions. I use the plural 'transgressions' deliberately, because (a) in coveting his neighbour's wife, and (b) in committing adultery, and (c) in committing murder, he transgressed three of the Ten Commandments (numbers 6, 7, and 10 – in reverse order).

2 Samuel 12-20: *Troubles*.

And then from chapter 12 to chapter 20 we read of David's troubles (mainly in his house and family) and *the decline of his kingdom*.

2 Samuel 21-24: *An appendix*.

In one sense, the closing section of the book (chapters 21 to 24) form an 'appendix',¹ leaving chapter 1 of the First Book of Kings to pick up the account of the life of David where 2 Samuel 20 left off.

Chapters 21 to 24 consist of six passages with a fairly obvious pattern and symmetrical structure. Working inwards:

Passages 1 and 6.

The first and last passages (2 Sam. 21. 1-14 and 2 Sam. 24. 1-25) are concerned with two occasions of national crisis when God visited His judgement upon Israel.

In the first, God's wrath was expressed in a famine brought on by drought;² in the second, it was expressed in a pestilence.³

The first was occasioned by a sin committed by Saul in the past,⁴ and the second was occasioned by a sin committed by David in the present.⁵

The first lasted for three successive years,⁶ and the second was scheduled for three successive days.⁷

In both incidents, following the expression of God's anger, David prayed,⁸ and, as a consequence of what God then revealed to him,⁹ David took remedial action which averted both judgements.

In each case this saving action involved several deaths; in the first, that of seven of Saul's descendants,¹⁰ and in the second that of some of Araunah's oxen.¹¹

Both narratives conclude with the same expression: 'God/the Lord was entreated for the land'.¹²

Passages 2 and 5.

The second passage is concerned with the impressive exploits performed by several of David's mighty men in conflicts with the Philistines,¹³ and the penultimate passage forms a longer list of David's mighty men and some of their exploits, mainly in conflicts with the Philistines.¹⁴

Passages 3 and 4.

Between these two records of David's mighty men and their exploits (and at the centre of the whole section), we find two passages concerned with David's 'words'. In (a) chapter 22 we

read 'the words' of David's 'song', and in (b) the first seven verses of chapter 23 we read his 'last words'.

(a) 'The words' of David's 'song' take the form of a historical survey of God's faithfulness and acts of deliverance in the past (together with David's thanksgiving and praise for these divine interventions).

(b) David's 'last words' take the form of a prophetic statement expressing his confidence in God's faithfulness to His covenant with him in the future.

The (a) first looks mainly backward, and the (b) second looks mainly forward.

And so we turn the spotlight on to 2 Samuel chapter 24.¹⁵

Summary and division of chapter 24

The previous chapter closed with an indirect reminder of one of David's great sins.¹⁶ Chapter 24 explicitly records another.

At the opening of the chapter we are told that God's wrath was kindled,¹⁷ and at the close that it was appeased.¹⁸ At the opening of the chapter we read of David overruling Joab's objection,¹⁹ and at the close we read of David rejecting Araunah's offer.²⁰

I will resist the temptation to break down the chapter into five sections with neat ('sweet-pea') headings such as:

1. The **people** numbered (vv. 1-9)
2. The **punishment** selected (vv. 10-14)
3. The **pestilence** strikes (vv. 15-17)
4. The **purchased** site and sacrifice (vv. 18-24)
5. The **propitiation** made (v. 25)

I prefer to divide the chapter into three sections, each of which focuses our attention on one or other of the three main human characters with whom David had dealings; namely:

- (i) Joab in verses 1 to 9;
- (ii) Gad in verses 10 to 17, and
- (iii) Araunah²¹ in verses 18 to 25.

Building on this three-way division, we can say that:

(i) David's sin is the subject of verses 1 to 9.
The section opens with David's command to take a census of 'Israel and Judah', and closes with a report of the total number of fighting men 'in Israel ... and ... Judah'.

(ii) David's confession is the subject of verses 10 to 17.
The section opens by telling us that 'David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned', and closes when he confesses for a second time, 'I have sinned'.

(iii) David's altar is the subject of verses 18 to 25.
The section 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'.

Exposition of chapter 24

(i) Verses 1 to 9: David's sin.

Verses 1-2.

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.

The evidence is that the events of chapter 21 took place early on in David's reign.²² However, the action described in our passage, 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 Absalom²³ and Sheba.²⁴

Here again we are taught (from David's sin and folly in his later days) that no one, however advanced in life and experience, is beyond the possibility of falling. Truly, 'let him who thinks he stands ...'.²⁵

I note that the action starts with God's anger being directed, not at David, but 'against Israel'. In chapter 21, *God's wrath against Israel had been occasioned by a sin of its earlier monarch*. But here in chapter 24 *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. Yet, given the known character of our God, we can safely assume that there was some great transgression which had provoked this particular response.²⁶

As we shall shortly discover, the Lord subsequently 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 on a much earlier occasion as punishments which would follow on from Israel's breach of His covenant.²⁷

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: (i) a three years' famine in its early days,²⁸ (ii) a three months' exile during its middle period,²⁹ and (iii) a three days' pestilence near its close.³⁰

Verse 1 says that 'the Lord ... moved ('prompted') David'. However, the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21 ascribes the action to Satan, who, we read, 'stood up' (presumably to accuse Israel; cf. Zech. 3. 1) and who 'provoked ('prompted', the same Hebrew word as in 2 Sam. 24. 13¹) David to number Israel'.³²

Clearly in these two accounts the Holy Spirit views the same incident from two distinct directions.

The full story seems to be that:

(i) Satan *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;

(ii) that the Lord *permitted* Satan to do this, and, through David's action, to accomplish His own purposes of (a) chastising His people for their sin, and (b) of later identifying the location which He had chosen as the site for His temple.³³

I have many times reflected on words which Joni once quoted from a friend of hers: 'God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves'.³⁴ That says it better than I ever could.

Not, of course, that it is unusual for God, in His sovereign workings, to over-rule the devil's activities to further His own purpose.

We might think of the 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',³⁵ 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 wrote, 'I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations'. Paul's unwelcome affliction preserved him in a humble condition of soul in which God could continue to use him. The Lord clearly used that very 'thorn' to prick the balloon of this converted Pharisee's pride.

God is said then to have done that which, in practice, He permitted Satan to do.³⁶

The census which David ordered was the third of six major censuses mentioned in scripture.³⁷

Personally, I enjoy the story told of a census officer 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 from that census. David wasn't interested in knowing *the population* of his kingdom.³⁸ His was a military census, aimed at assessing the size and strength, not (a) of his standing army (which was well-known) but (b) 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, (i) by informing us that David entrusted it to his army commanders,³⁹ and (ii) by making it clear that the results were in terms of those who 'drew sword'.⁴⁰

It is perhaps significant also that this narrative follows the listing of David's mighty men.⁴¹

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'.⁴²

That David's interest was military is confirmed by the fact that, in common with Moses, he 'took not the number of them from twenty years old and under'.⁴³

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

Indeed, David himself had previously 'numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them'.⁴⁴

I suspect that part 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 (a) first in preparation for an invasion of Canaan from Kadesh Barnea, and (b) later in preparation for Joshua's invasion from the east and as a basis for later apportioning the land of Canaan.

In David's own case, on the previous occasion, he had been compelled to muster his fighting force on account of the strength of Absalom's revolt.

But now there were no circumstances which necessitated such a course of action.

So what was David's motivation? It is possible, I suppose, that, following the rebellions of both Absalom and Sheba,⁴⁵ David may have thought it prudent to reassess his military situation against the possibility of similar uprisings.

Yet a country-wide census for such a purpose would have achieved nothing, for David would have had no way of knowing what proportion of the men of fighting age would have deserted him and thrown in their lot with any would-be usurper.

And, speaking for myself, I see no mileage in the suggestion made by Flavius Josephus (and repeated by not-a-few 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 had been required by God in connection with the first census conducted by Moses.⁴⁶

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 should make amends for his sin by arranging for such a collection to be made.

As far as I can see, we are really down to David either:

(i) contemplating some military campaign, without any word of direction from God, or, more likely I suspect,

(ii) simply wanting to glory in the size of his potential fighting force. That is, in one word (and it is an ugly word), it was a matter of pride!

But, in either case, it came down to David putting his trust, not, as in his earlier days, in God, but in what one of his descendants (King Hezekiah) once labelled 'an arm of flesh'.⁴⁷

How sad to witness 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 previous, had asserted his trust in God as his Rock, fortress and deliverer,⁴⁸ now looking to the size of his army for his confidence and security. How sad that a man whose life had been characterised by faith⁴⁹ should now stoop to walking by sight and not by faith.⁵⁰

But for David to put his trust in his military might rather than in his all-powerful God⁵¹ was as unnecessary as it was unwise.

And David, of all people, should have known better. For we know that David was well aware of the history of Gideon.⁵²

And had not God once explained to Gideon, before whittling down his fighting force from 32,000 to a mere 300⁵³ (then to face an army 450 times their own⁵⁴), '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"?'⁵⁵

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'?⁵⁶

Alas for David, it does seem that, at *this* juncture, his heart had, to some extent, turned 'away from the Lord'.⁵⁷ And it does seem that it was his pride and vainglory which lay at the root. And I cannot help but think of the words of the apostle John concerning 'all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'.⁵⁸ We could perhaps say that, back in chapter 11, David had fallen prey to the 'lust' (the 'desire') of 'the flesh' and to the 'lust' of 'the eyes',⁵⁹ and that now he has fallen prey to 'the pride of life' ... to 'pride in external circumstances', which is what as I understand John to mean.

And certainly David's 'external circumstances' were now comfortable. He knows no running now from either Saul or Absalom!

And, as many of us know only too well, comfort and affluence brings their own dangers. With hindsight, David could see this for himself. It seems clear that he wrote Psalm 30 about the time when he bought the area around Araunah's threshing-floor to be the site of the future Temple.⁶⁰ Note the relevance of David's words in verse 6, 'I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved'.

How easy it is in times of prosperity for us to become self-sufficient and to rely on our own resources.

I feel sure that, having penned verse of Psalm 30, David would have appreciated the words of the English Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs: 'If adversity has slain her thousands, prosperity has slain her ten thousands'.⁶¹

There was nothing wrong, of course, in David *having* troops, whether these comprised his standing army or were simply available to respond to any time of crisis. After all, that is why he had 'Joab, the commander of the army',⁶² and his other army commanders.⁶³

There was nothing wrong in David having good troops. There was nothing wrong in David having the very best of troops. What was wrong was when he put his trust 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 helps (all fine *in their place*), but we must continually examine our hearts as to whether we may sometimes be guilty of putting more trust in these than we do in our God!⁶⁴

David told Joab and the army commanders to 'go through' the land '*from Dan even to Beersheba*', an expression commonly used to describe the territory of Israel from its northern extremity to its southern extremity,⁶⁵ a distance of some 150 miles.

Verses 3-9.

In practice, Joab and the army commanders chose to cross the Jordan, to proceed northwards, then westwards, and then southwards, thereby covering the land in an anticlockwise direction.⁶⁶

Although the text says that they went through 'all the land',⁶⁷ 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!⁶⁸ If that was 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. It may have been that, 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'.⁶⁹

But we cannot fail to observe that, before he and the others set out, Joab had registered a strong (albeit respectful) objection to the orders which he had received from the King. And yet, even when doing so, he was careful to express his unqualified support for David's rule, first, by introducing his objection with a blessing on David's people,⁷⁰ and then by addressing David three times with due deference as 'my lord'.⁷¹ And Joab made it clear to David that he was not alone in submitting to David's rule; 'all' of David's subjects, he pointed out, were loyal to David.⁷²

'What more', Joab was saying, 'could the King ask?' Numbering the adult males would increase neither (a) their number nor (b) their devotion. 'Best to forget the whole idea, sir' was what David's, often ruthless, but now clear-thinking, nephew, was suggesting.⁷³

We can gauge just how strong Joab's opposition was to David's instruction from the statement in 1 Chronicles 21 that 'the king's word was abominable ('abhorrent') to Joab'.⁷⁴ But, to Joab's credit, having made his views clear, he bowed to the King's authority and went as directed.

It was over nine months before he and his associates returned,⁷⁵ armed with statistics which, although short of the tribe of Benjamin, recorded a result over twice that of the last national military census.⁷⁶

But it was only when the result of the census was known that this nine-month⁷⁷ 'pregnancy' of David's sin brought forth its fitting offspring ... David's repentance. For it was only then that the King's conscience struck home.

Verses 10 to 17: David's confession.

Verses 10-14.

We have to acknowledge that, although long overdue, David's confession of his sin did at least (unlike that following his previous great sin in chapter 11) precede the visit which he received from God's prophet. On this occasion, the coming of God's prophet was the result of David's repentance and not its cause.

We should observe also that David made no attempt to play down his guilt; note his words, 'sinned *greatly*' and 'done *very foolishly*'.⁷⁸

But, as David was soon to discover, he was not the only one to view his sin gravely. The Lord Himself regarded David's sin, not only as serious, but as punishable! 'God was displeased on account of this thing, and He smote Israel'.⁷⁹ Forgivable, yes; to be ignored, no.

As we noted when considering verses 1 and 2, not one of the three options of punishment which God offered David was aimed at him alone. Each possible punishment would have affected the people in general and each would therefore have had two effects:

(i) first, they were each calculated to reduce the very numbers of fighting men in which David trusted, and

(ii) second, they were each calculated to act as a chastisement for the people overall, whose sin had been originally responsible for the whole sad episode. We should note that David used the expression 'let us now fall', as well as the expression 'let me not fall'.⁸⁰

Having previously suffered both (i) a severe three-year famine⁸¹ and (ii) fleeing from his foes (from Saul,⁸² and, more recently, from his son Absalom⁸³), it may seem perfectly natural that David should opt for the third alternative (of a pestilence), the more so as this would occupy the shortest timescale.

But in point of fact none of these considerations weighed the heaviest with David when he opted for 'three days' *pestilence*' ('the sword of the Lord' as it is described in 1 Chronicles 21⁸⁴).

Following his earlier great sin, David had proved that, in spite of the gravity of that sin, His God showed to him a 'multitude' (an 'abundance') of His 'mercies'.⁸⁵

Armed with this knowledge, he casts himself afresh on the Lord's 'great mercies'.⁸⁶

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*.

David's decision to number the people was certainly 'very foolish',⁸⁷ but his choice of divine discipline was certainly very wise.

Verses 15-17.

And yet, in spite of God's 'merciful' shortening of the plague's duration,⁸⁸ no less than 70,000 men died.⁸⁹ That amounts to over one-twentieth of David's entire fighting force. 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!⁹⁰

It is at least possible that the angel followed the same route as the census-takers had. That is, just as Joab and his associates had ended their circuit around Israel and Judah at Jerusalem,⁹¹ so the angel may well have reached Jerusalem last of all⁹² in his circuit of destruction. But the angel didn't need over nine and a half months to fulfil his divinely-given commission!

This was by far the most destructive plague ever to fall on the nation of Israel:

(i) Numbers 16 records that in the plague which followed the rebellion of Korah the death toll ran to 14,700.⁹³

(ii) 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 24,000.⁹⁴

(iii) But here in 2 Samuel 24, the toll reached 70,000.⁹⁵

No wonder that, with a dent of 70,000 knocked in them, the now-worthless census results were never filed in the official archives!⁹⁶

Verses 18-25: the altar.

But at this point time and space have beaten me, and I shall need to fast forward the video, as it were!

Following ...:

(i) David's second acknowledgement of his sin, this time being concerned not for his own well-being but for that of the nation,⁹⁷ and

(ii) his 'shepherd-heart' prayer for them ('these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house';⁹⁸ in effect, 'smite their shepherd, but spare the flock, O Lord'),

... David is told by God through the prophet Gad to erect an altar at Araunah's threshing floor,⁹⁹ near the spot where the plague had been arrested and where the angel of the Lord now hovered, with sword suspended, as per God's command, over the royal city.¹⁰⁰

This David was quick to do, having rejected Araunah's generous offer of freely donating (i) his threshing-floor, (ii) his oxen and (iii) his threshing instruments and yokes,¹⁰¹ and having insisted on paying the full price (50 shekels of silver) for all three.¹⁰²

Indeed, David insisted on subsequently purchasing the whole of the site from Araunah 'for the full price' (600 shekels of gold).¹⁰³

David was not in the business, he made clear to Araunah, of offering to God that which cost him nothing.¹⁰⁴

Had David assented to honour God with the other man's possessions, Araunah's oxen may have still been counted as David's offering. But *though counted as his offering, they would not have been his sacrifice!*

And David's words speak directly to me, 'I will not offer ... to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing'. For his words compel me to ask myself, 'How much do my Christian life and service cost me, in terms of money, time, effort and self-denial?' Often, I speak to my shame, very little!

Following his offering and its 'striking' acceptance by the Lord,¹⁰⁵ David consecrated the area as the site on which were to be built the future Temple ('the house of the Lord') and 'altar of burnt offering for Israel'.¹⁰⁶

I find it interesting that the Books of Samuel *begin* with a debased shrine at *Shiloh*,¹⁰⁷ but they *close* with the identification of the site of a new shrine at *Jerusalem*.¹⁰⁸

And I enjoy Warren Wiersbe's comment that '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!*'¹⁰⁹

Mount Moriah.

2 Chronicles 3 opens with the words, 'Now Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite'.

It was, then, there on Araunah's threshing floor '*on Mount Moriah*', that David built his 'altar to the Lord'¹¹⁰ and that Solomon later built the 'house of the Lord' – the Temple.¹¹¹

And what great thoughts these simple facts suggest.

(i) A thousand years before.

For example, that the angel of the Lord's sword was held aloft, never to fall,¹¹² in the vicinity of that very spot where, one thousand years' before, a knife had likewise been suspended (then over Abraham's son) never to fall!¹¹³

(ii) A thousand years after.

But, even more significant for us, given that the Jerusalem Temple was later erected on that very spot,¹¹⁴ both the patriarch's knife and the angel's sword were held high in the vicinity of that very spot where, one thousand years after David's offering, a cross was raised. But at that time no voice from heaven called for any knife to be put away or any sword to be sheathed.

Indeed, in stark contrast, it was then that the very sword of Jehovah was bidden (in the words of the prophet) to 'awake'¹¹⁵ and to 'smite' God's shepherd, our Lord Jesus.¹¹⁶

*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.*¹¹⁷

In our chapter, David pleaded for God to 'put away' his iniquity,¹¹⁸ just as some years before the Lord had 'put away' his sin in connection with the Bathsheba/Uriah incident.¹¹⁹

And David was heard.¹²⁰

Forgiveness – on what basis?

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 us listen again to the words of the apostle Paul, when he speaks of:

'Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation (by which we are to understand the averting of the wrath of God against sin and sinners)¹²¹ 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*'.¹²²

We must note that, in the incident we have been considering, although the sword of judgement was restrained and suspended over a guilty people *for a time*,¹²³ it could only be *permanently sheathed* when an acceptable offering had been made.¹²⁴

And so likewise, Abraham and David (and countless thousands more of God's people living prior to the cross) were, in God's forbearance, spared His wrath, but *only until such time* as a sacrifice could be offered which would forever¹²⁵ settle the outstanding debt.¹²⁶

And *settled it was*, not only for them, but, praise God, for us too who (living since the cross) are justified by believing in Jesus¹²⁷ ... settled by the One whose foretold birthplace was secured for Him, in the providence of God, as a result of another (and much larger) census!¹²⁸

But that, as they say, is *another story*

Notes

¹ 'Because they stand apart from the preceding episodes, they are sometimes labelled an "appendix"', C. E. Morrison, '2 Samuel', Liturgical Press, page 275.

² 2 Sam. 21. 1 and 10.

³ 2 Sam. 24. 1, 15.

⁴ 2 Sam. 21. 1.

⁵ 2 Sam. 24. 10-15.

⁶ 2 Sam. 21. 1.

⁷ 2 Sam. 24. 13-15.

⁸ 2 Sam. 21. 1; 2 Sam. 24. 17.

⁹ 2 Sam. 21. 1; 2 Sam. 24. 18.

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 21. 8-9.

¹¹ 2 Samuel 24. 22-25.

¹² 2 Sam. 21. 14; 2 Sam. 24. 25. J. N. Darby translates this on both occasions as 'God/the Lord *was propitious* to the land'.

¹³ 2 Sam. 21. 15-22.

¹⁴ 2 Sam. 23. 8-39.

¹⁵ The length of the 'famine' option of seven years in verse 13 is quoted as being 'three years' in the Greek Old Testament; the ESV and NIV adopt this reading. This brings the account there into line with the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21 verse 12. It is just possible, I guess, that a scribe who copied the manuscript of 2 Samuel was subconsciously influenced by the seven years famine in the days of Joseph, Gen. 41. 27. Undoubtedly, 'three' years of famine would fit neater into the context; 'viz., three evils to choose from, and each lasting through three divisions of time. But this agreement favours the seven rather than the three, which is open to the suspicion of being intentionally made to conform to the rest', C. F. Keil, '1 & 2 Samuel', Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, page 507.

The only alternative explanation of the seeming contradiction which I have come across runs as follows:

'A careful reading reveals that there is no contradiction as the words in question in both passages are not even from the same speaker.

'Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Choose what you will: either three years of famine ...', 1 Chron. 21. 11-12.

'Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall three years of famine come to you ...', 2 Sam. 24. 13.

'The 'three years' in 1 Chronicles 21. 11-12 are the words of the Lord whereas the 'seven years' in 2 Samuel 24. 13 are the words of the prophet Gad ... The verbatim words of the Lord as recorded in 1 Chronicles 21. 11-12 must fit in 2 Samuel 24.13 in between "and told him" and "and said unto him". Otherwise, the phrase "and told him, and said unto him" is very redundant.

'Thus the prophet Gad first "told him [David]" the verbatim words of the Lord as recorded in 1 Chronicles 21. 11-12, and then "said unto him [David], Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land?" Dynamic translations ... unfortunately remove the clause, "and told him" ... but this clause is the key to understanding the seeming discrepancy between the two accounts.

'Why did Gad speak of "seven years" after delivering the Lord's word concerning three years of famine? The figure "seven years" spoken by Gad is not the number of years that the Lord will be adding in the future. The seven years is the combination of the four prior years of famine and the possible future addition of three years. Prior to this incident, in 2 Samuel 21. 1, the narrator says "Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year". And from the time of 2 Samuel 21. 1 to 2 Samuel 24. 13 we understand that there was a lapse of one year. Thus by the time the LORD gave David this dilemma in 2 Samuel 24. 13, there were four years of famine. Now, when Gad asked David, "Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land?" Gad was basically saying, "Shall [a total of] seven years of famine (four previous years and three added years) come unto thee in thy land?" Seven years of famine would have been the ultimate result of receiving three more years of famine'.

Source: <http://www.kjvtoday.com/home/seven-years-or-three-years-in-2-samuel-2413>.

Personally, I am not convinced.

¹⁶ 'Uriah the Hittite', 2 Sam. 23. 39.

¹⁷ 2 Sam. 24. 1.

¹⁸ 2 Sam. 24. 25.

¹⁹ 2 Sam. 24. 4.

²⁰ 2 Sam. 24. 24.

²¹ 'Araunah' is named 'Ornan' in 1 Chron. 21. 15-28. Both names 'Araunah' and 'Ornan' derive from the same Hebrew root, meaning 'to be strong'.

²² 2 Samuel 21 opens with a very vague and general time note, 'Then there was a famine in the days of David'. This stands in marked contrast to the far more specific 'after this' which we have encountered at the opening of several earlier chapters (2 Sam. 2. 1; 8. 1; 10. 1; 13. 1; 15. 1). In this way, the Holy Spirit holds us back from taking it for granted that the famine of chapter 21 followed chronologically after the events of chapter 20. I am satisfied that, at this point, the Holy Spirit has rewound the video to an earlier time in David's reign, but to what point I do not know.

Verse 7 certainly suggests that David had already brought Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, to Jerusalem before the famine; that is, that the events in our section come after chapter 9. I suspect soon after.

But it seems to me that the subsequent burial of the bones of Saul and Jonathan as an act of respect suggests that this incident belongs to a relatively early part of David's reign, as does the impression that Saul's seven descendants who died were young, and probably unmarried. (Else, I ask, why did their wives not share Rizpah's vigil with her?)

Again, I can think of no reason why God's judgement on Saul's very public sin should have been delayed until David's later years.

So I suspect that the incident of the famine and the Gibeonites fell somewhere between the events recorded in chapter 9 and the events recorded in chapter 16 of 2 Samuel. But I am in no position to be dogmatic.

See Note 28 below.

²³ 2 Sam. 15-18.

²⁴ 2 Sam. 20.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 10. 12.

²⁶ Just as, for example, there had been in the case of Uzzah, recorded in chapter 6.

²⁷ Famine, sword, and pestilence/plague were revealed punishments of the Lord against His sinful people:

(i) '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.

(ii) '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; cf. Jer. 14. 12.

²⁸ 2 Sam. 21. 1. 'Internal references in 2 Samuel enable us to date this incident early in David's reign between Mephibosheth's arrival in Jerusalem and the beginning of the Ammonite wars', Thomas Constable, '*Expository Notes*' on 2 Sam. 21. 1-6.

²⁹ 2 Sam. 15. 16 to 2 Sam. 19. 25.

³⁰ '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', A. P. Stanley, '*Samuel to the Captivity*', Lectures on the Jewish Church, Volume 2, Lecture XXIV, page 89.

³¹ Cf. its use by David in 1 Sam. 26. 19.

³² 1 Chron. 21. 1.

³³ 1 Chron. 22. 1.

³⁴ Steve Estes, quoted by Joni Eareckson Tada in '*Why Do God's Children Suffer?*'

³⁵ 2 Cor. 12. 7.

³⁶ This is not 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', Job 1. 21.

- ³⁷ (i) By Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai (Num. 1. 2–3)
 (ii) By Moses in the plain of Moab (Num. 26. 2)
 (iii) By David (2 Sam. 24. 1–10; 1 Chron. 21. 1–6)
 (iv) By Solomon (2 Chron. 2. 17–18)
 (v) In the days of Zerubbabel and Ezra (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 8)
 (vi) By Caesar Augustus (Luke 2. 1–3)

³⁸ See 1 Chron. 27. 23; that is, this was not aimed at knowing the total population in the land.

³⁹ 2 Sam. 24. 2, 4.

⁴⁰ 2 Sam. 24. 9.

⁴¹ 2 Sam. 23. 8–39.

⁴² Num. 1. 3; 26. 2.

⁴³ 1 Chron. 27. 23.

⁴⁴ 2 Sam. 18. 1.

⁴⁵ 2 Sam. 15–18, 20.

⁴⁶ '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*', Flavius Josephus, *'Antiquities of the Jews'*, Book 7, Chapter 13, Section 1 (cf. Exod. 30. 11–16). Interestingly, in 2018, a small stone weight which was once used to measure the half-shekel temple tax during the First Temple period was unearthed in Jerusalem; see ... <https://biblearchaeology.org/current-events-list/4470-first-temple-era-stone-weight-unearthed-in-jerusalem>.

⁴⁷ 2 Chron. 32. 8. Cf. David's words to Goliath in 1 Sam. 17. 45.

⁴⁸ 2 Sam. 22. 2–3.

⁴⁹ Heb. 11. 1–2, 32.

⁵⁰ Contrast 2 Cor. 5. 7.

⁵¹ 2 Sam. 22. 33.

⁵² 2 Sam. 11. 20–21 ('Jerubbesheth' was 'Jerubbaal', that is 'Gideon'); cf. Judg. 9. 53.

⁵³ Judg. 7. 1–7.

⁵⁴ Judg. 8. 10.

⁵⁵ Judges 7. 2.

⁵⁶ 1 Sam. 14. 6.

⁵⁷ Jer. 17. 5.

⁵⁸ 1 John 2. 16.

⁵⁹ 2 Sam. 11. 2, 4.

⁶⁰ 'It may mean that the psalmist composed it for the occasion of the dedication of the Lord's house. This would not be the dedication of Solomon's temple since David had already died when Solomon dedicated it. It could mean the tent that David erected in Jerusalem to house the ark of the covenant when he brought it into the city (2 Sam. 6. 17). Or perhaps this occasion was the dedication of the temple site', Thomas Constable, *op.cit.*, the introduction to Psalm 30.

Psalm 30 forms part of the liturgy recited at the Festival of Hanukkah ('the Feast of Dedication' of John 10. 22) by some Hasidic and Sephardi Jews. The Festival was instituted by the Maccabees to commemorate the purification and dedication of the Temple following its earlier desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes.

⁶¹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *'Contentment, Prosperity and God's Glory'*, page 68. And we know that the quotation from Mr Burroughs is based on the words of a song once sung to commemorate David's 'stunning' victory over Goliath, 1 Sam. 18. 6-7.

⁶² 2 Sam. 24. 2.

⁶³ 2 Sam. 24. 4.

⁶⁴ Cf. 'we should not trust in ourselves, but in God', 2 Cor. 1. 9.

⁶⁵ See Judg. 20. 1; 1 Sam. 3. 20; 2 Sam. 3. 10; 17. 11; 1 Kings 4. 25; 2 Chron. 30. 5.

⁶⁶ 2 Sam. 24. 5-8.

⁶⁷ 2 Sam. 24. 8.

⁶⁸ Num. 1. 49; 2. 33.

⁶⁹ 1 Chron. 27. 24.

⁷⁰ 'May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are', 2 Sam. 24. 3.

⁷¹ 1 Chron. 21. 3.

⁷² 'Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants?' 1 Chron. 21. 3.

⁷³ Joab had remonstrated with David on at least two previous occasions; 2 Sam. 3. 23-24 and 2 Sam. 19. 4-7.

⁷⁴ 1 Chron. 21. 6.

⁷⁵ 2 Sam. 24. 8.

⁷⁶ Cf. 2 Sam. 24. 9 with Num. 26. 1-2, 51. [On a point of detail, the number quoted for 'all Israel' in 1 Chron. 21. 5 is 300,000 higher than that quoted in 2 Sam. 24. 9. Allowing for rounding, the variation may be explained by the inclusion in the Chronicles account of the regular standing army of 288,000 (1 Chron. 27. 1-15).]

⁷⁷ 2 Sam. 24. 8.

⁷⁸ 2 Sam. 24. 10 // 1 Chron. 21. 8.

⁷⁹ 1 Chron. 21. 7.

⁸⁰ 2 Sam. 24. 14.

⁸¹ 2 Sam. 21. 1.

⁸² 1 Sam. 19. 10, 12, 18; 20. 1; 21. 10, 17; 27. 4.

⁸³ 2 Sam. 15. 14.

⁸⁴ Verse 12.

⁸⁵ Psa. 51. 1 literally.

⁸⁶ 2 Sam. 24. 14; the word translated 'mercies' being the same as in Psalm 50. 1.

⁸⁷ 2 Sam. 24. 10.

⁸⁸ 2 Sam. 24. 16; 1 Chron. 21. 17, 27.

⁸⁹ 2 Sam. 24. 15; 1 Chron. 21. 14.

⁹⁰ 1 Chron. 21. 12, 16. For 'the angel of the Lord ... having a drawn sword in his hand', 1 Chron. 21. 16, compare Num. 22. 23 and Josh. 5. 13-14.

⁹¹ 2 Sam. 24. 8.

⁹² 2 Sam. 24. 16; 1 Chron. 21. 15-16.

- ⁹³ Numb. 16. 48-49.
- ⁹⁴ Numb. 25. 8-9.
- ⁹⁵ This was over three times the number of soldiers of Absalom's army who had perished in his abortive rebellion, 2 Sam. 18. 7.
- ⁹⁶ 1 Chron. 27. 24.
- ⁹⁷ 2 Sam. 24. 17; cf. v. 10.
- ⁹⁸ 2 Sam. 24. 17b. Such a plea was characteristic of David. See the words of Asaph, '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 skilful hand', Psa. 78. 70-72; cf. 2 Sam. 5. 1-2.
- ⁹⁹ 2 Sam. 24. 18.
- ¹⁰⁰ 1 Chron. 21. 15c.
- ¹⁰¹ 2 Sam. 24. 22-23.
- ¹⁰² 2 Sam. 24. 24.
- ¹⁰³ 1 Chron. 21. 25.
- ¹⁰⁴ 2 Sam. 24. 24.
- ¹⁰⁵ "He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering', 1 Chron. 21. 26. The descent of fire onto the altar to consume a sacrifice took place in the Old Testament on only three other occasions; Lev. 9. 23-24; 2 Chron. 7. 1; 1 Kings 18. 38.
- ¹⁰⁶ 1 Chron. 22. 1.
- ¹⁰⁷ 1 Sam. 1. 3; 2. 14.
- ¹⁰⁸ 2 Sam. 24. 25; 1 Chron. 21. 26; 22. 1.
- ¹⁰⁹ Warren Wiersbe, '*With the Word Bible Commentary*', on 2 Samuel 24. 18-25.
- ¹¹⁰ 2 Sam. 24. 25.
- ¹¹¹ 2 Chron. 3. 1.
- ¹¹² 1 Chron. 21. 15
- ¹¹³ 'The threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite ... Now it happened that Abraham came and offered his son Isaac for a burnt-offering at that very place; and when the youth was ready to have his throat cut, a ram appeared on a sudden, standing by the altar, which Abraham sacrificed in the stead of his son', Flavius Josephus, *op.cit.*, Book 7, Chapter 13, Section 4.
- ¹¹⁴ 2 Chron. 3. 1.
- ¹¹⁵ To leap, as it were, from its scabbard.
- ¹¹⁶ 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd', Zech. 13. 7; cf. Mark 14. 26-27.
- ¹¹⁷ Mrs A. R. Cousin, '*O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!*
- ¹¹⁸ 2 Sam. 24. 10; 1 Chron. 21. 8.
- ¹¹⁹ 2 Sam. 12. 13 (the same word translated 'put away').
- ¹²⁰ 'David saw that the Lord had answered him', 1 Chron. 21. 28.

¹²¹ According to the New Testament, our Lord Jesus both (a) is a 'propitiation', and (b) has 'made propitiation':

(i) 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins', 1 John 4. 10 RV.

(ii) 'Christ Jesus: whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, to shew His righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God', Rom. 3. 24-25 RV.

(iii) 'That He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to *make* propitiation for the sins of the people', Heb. 2. 17 RV.

(iv) 'He *is* the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world', 1 John 2. 2 RV.

'Propitiation ... has in view the satisfying or exonerating of the demands of divine righteousness and divine holiness ... In his Expository Dictionary, W. E. Vine draws attention to the fact that "in non-biblical Greek the word propitiation (*hilaskomai*) meant to conciliate, to appease, to propitiate, cause the gods to be reconciled; their goodwill was not regarded as their natural condition, but as something to be earned. They believed their gods to be alienated in feeling from man. But in the N.T. it never means to conciliate God". On the contrary the New Testament indicates that propitiation was initiated by God ... It was because of His love towards man that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins ... Not only is He the propitiation, but He accomplished it when he offered up Himself as a sacrificial victim, Heb. 2. 17; 9. 14, 26, 28 ... It is important to note the change introduced by the Revised Version in Romans 3. 25. The Lord is not the propitiation because we believe, but because of His blood', J. M. Davies, '*Propitiation*', Treasury of Bible Doctrine, Precious Seed, pages 176-178.

¹²² Rom. 3. 24-25.

¹²³ 1 Chron. 21. 15.

¹²⁴ 1 Chron. 21. 26-27.

¹²⁵ 'We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all* ... for by one offering He hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified', Heb. 10. 10, 14.

¹²⁶ They were, in effect, forgiven 'on credit'.

¹²⁷ Rom. 3. 26.

¹²⁸ Luke 2. 1-7.