

2ND SAMUEL

Week 38, chapter 24 END

This will be our 38th and final lesson in 2nd Samuel. We will have spent 83 lessons in total in the entire Book of Samuel combined (1st and 2nd Samuel). Recall that originally what we have today as 4 separate Bible books (1st and 2nd Samuel, and 1st and 2nd Kings) was but one large work that became divided by Hebrew scholars into two books (it happened in Alexandria, Egypt and before the birth of Christ). The first book was called the Book of Kingdoms and the second called the Book of the Kings. Kingdoms was later further divided into 1st and 2nd Samuel, just as Kings was later divided into 1st and 2nd Kings. This harmed nothing; rather it was merely an attempt to make the enormous work more readable and easier to work with.

Let's begin today by re-reading 2nd Samuel 24.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 24 all

Last week we dealt with the difficult opening verse that in English seems to say that God told David to go and take a census of the people of Israel and Judah. What we found was that God "incited" David towards thinking wrong thoughts and the purpose for this was as a means for the Lord to punish His people using His usual way; and that way is by using a person or a nation to bring oppression upon Israel in consequence for Israel's sins.

These wrong thoughts in David produced his self-centered and egotistical royal mandate that the army go and conduct a census. Did God put this exact wrong thought into David's mind? While reasonable people can differ on the answer to this question, my position is that He did not. Rather the thought to conduct a census came for David's own evil inclination (David's **yetzer harah**) that every human, redeemed or not, Hebrew or gentile is born with and

will live with until we are separated from these fleshly bodies at death. In fact we noticed that in 1Chronicles (in the parallel story of this event), that the claim is that the Adversary (Satan) put this thought of a census into David's mind. Such an idea fits well and makes sense, because the good inclination is the realm of godly thoughts while the evil inclination is the realm of wicked thoughts. God does not dwell within our evil inclinations and Satan does not dwell within our good inclinations. So it is self-evident that while Yehoveh incited David to consult his own evil inclination, it was the Adversary who resided in David's evil inclination whose thought David agreed to.

This, admittedly, is a hard explanation of how the Lord, the Adversary, and David all had roles in this process. But it's hard because we are trying to use human words and human thoughts to explain spiritual circumstances. This reality has challenged Hebrews and Christians in all ages and especially in the modern age where humanism is all the rage (even within Judaism and the Church) such that we either elevate our ways, or lower His ways, to put God and man on approximately equal footing. So when we forget this critical passage from the Book of Isaiah, then we tend to get especially confused or misled:

(Isa 55:8-9 CJB)

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways," says ADONAI.

⁹ "As high as the sky is above the earth are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Thus this is a good time to remind you that so much of the figurative speech about God that we read in chapters 22 and 23 (that attributes human emotions and thoughts as also being the same in God) is also present in this final chapter of 2nd Samuel.

We left off with David calling for his General of the Army and telling him to "go around" and conduct a census of all people under David's monarch. And we found that the word translated into "go around", or "roaming", or "going to and fro" is in Hebrew **shut**. **Shut** is a Hebrew word that is associated with wicked intent and so when David instructed Joab to **shut** and count the citizens of Israel, it was immediately clear that to do so was wrong and would have malignant effects. The worldly and politically adept Joab knows that what David is ordering is going to be highly unwelcomed by the people of Israel and so could produce some dangerous unintended consequences.

In verse 2 we find David's rationale for ordering this census: it was "so that I can know how many people there are." In other words it was merely because David could stop and assess just how big his kingdom had become. And just like for most any Christian or Jewish congregation leader it seems that knowing how many people who are in their flock is important to them. Often there is sound and good reason to need to know this information, but as often as not the seeking of this data also has more to do with an egocentric notion of measuring institutional and personal success as based on quantity. And (in general) God's principle is that there is but a small handful of specific divine REASONS for a leader needing to know and pay attention to quantity, especially as it concerns people. And what else is a census but the name of a procedure to ascertain the quantity of people?

My point is that there was nothing particularly pressing or essential that David needed to know such that he needed an accurate counting of his subjects; this was all based on personal aggrandizement (and to a large extent even the Rabbis, who at all cost try to protect David's image, agree with this). Joab knew this and so openly challenged the King of Israel's motivation for this dangerous decree. In verse 3 Joab essentially says (and I paraphrase), 'look; I hope along with you that since arriving in Canaan that our population has increased a hundred times over. We all know our population is large and growing but does it really matter just what the precise number is? So what is it about doing this census that you are hoping will give you personal pleasure?' That last question is somewhat rhetorical; Joab fully understands that unless there is some underlying reason or grand plan that Joab isn't aware of (and this is unlikely) then he is baffled by why David would undertake such an enormous and unpopular program.

But the aged David, who is on the downside of both his career as king and in his relationship with God, dismisses **Yo'av's** objections and in verse 4 the army sets about to dutifully (however reluctantly to) follow the king's order to count the people of Israel and Judah.

The obvious question at this point is: what is so wrong about a census? In order to get to the answer we have to attack this issue on both the earthly/human and spiritual/divine levels. At this point in chapter 24 the issue is earthly/human. From a political viewpoint a census would have made the people very uneasy and suspicious. After David's series of indiscretions (especially with Bathsheba), his obvious attitude that he was at all times above the law, and two rebellions that demonstrated the dissatisfaction and mistrust of the government among substantial segments of Israeli society, conducting a census couldn't be more ill timed. Setting aside a king's self-centered desire simply to enjoy the extent of his empire (not unlike the mental picture we get of Midas laying upon a mountainous pile of golden coins and lavishing in his untold riches), there were the typical practical governmental reasons for counting people, none of which did the people particularly care for. And the two primary reasons were for taxation and for conscription into the army. Up to now it doesn't appear that there was a

nationwide formal system of taxation under David (however without doubt there had to be some means of revenue to coming in). That would soon change when his son Solomon took over. So on one hand the primary fear for the average citizen would have been conscription.

We mustn't forget that David maintained only a rather small personal bodyguard and a very modest professional army that consisted mostly of leaders and officers. When war was contemplated an army was formed as a militia from among the civilian citizenry. Farmer, herders, and craftsman would lay aside tending flocks, herds, fields and making goods in exchange for taking up arms. Such a thing was quite a sacrifice on the people of Israel because when the adult males were away at war the burden of supporting their families fell primarily to the women. Thus when Joab and his officers went throughout the nation to count the people, the immediate suspicion was that war was coming. And just like it is today in the USA, people come down strongly on both sides of the issue of military conflict. Such a thing can cause great division within any society. David seemed unconcerned about such prospects, while Joab knew that whether David did harbor a secret plan for a foreign war of conquest or if the census itself caused eruption into civil unrest, Joab and his men would wind up right in the middle of it.

But then is also the spiritual/divine side of the matter of a census. For Israel a census was supposed to be for a godly purpose. As an example this one is for the purpose redemption:

(Exo 30:11-16 CJB)

¹¹ ADONAI said to Moshe,

¹² "When you take a census of the people of Isra'el and register them, each, upon registration, is to pay a ransom for his life to ADONAI, to avoid any breakout of plague among them during the time of the census.

¹³ Everyone subject to the census is to pay as an offering to ADONAI half a shekel [one-fifth of an ounce of silver]- by the standard of the sanctuary shekel (a shekel equals twenty gerahs).

¹⁴ Everyone over twenty years of age who is subject to the census is to give this offering to ADONAI-

¹⁵ the rich is not to give more or the poor less than the half-shekel when giving ADONAI's offering to atone for your lives.

¹⁶ You are to take the atonement money from the people of Isra'el and use it for the service in the tent of meeting, so that it will be a reminder of the people of Isra'el before ADONAI to atone for your lives."

A later God ordained census in Numbers starts off like this and it was for the purpose of Holy War:

^{CJB} Numbers 1:1 ADONAI spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month of the second year after they had left the land of Egypt. He said,

² "Take a census of the entire assembly of the people of Isra'el, by clans and families. Record the names of all the men

³ twenty years old and over who are subject to military service in Isra'el. You and Aharon are to enumerate them company by company.

What we see from this is (as a God-principle) that a census must be God-ordained and for a purpose in line with God's will and His Torah. Secondly that the Exodus passage seems to indicate that the divinely prescribed penalty for doing a census outside of God's protocol and instructions is a plague. And of course that is exactly what we see happen as a result of David's census.

In verse 5 the army led by Joab sets off to compass the land and make the count. The territory that is listed in this passage essentially covers the land that was currently under control of David's monarchy in Yerushalayim. While there is evidence that the exact route as listed might be missing parts of it, the general route of it comports well with other texts and what is known from that era. He starts off at **Aroer** that is located on the established boundary between the tribe of Gad and the nation of Moab. They went north, through the territory of Gad, traveling up the middle of the tribal district.

From there they arrived at **Ya'zer**, which was an Israelite border fortification established to

defend against the Kingdom of Ammon (the Kingdom of Jordan in our time). They continued north through Gilead to a place that is called Tachtim-Hodshi. There is scholarly disagreement as to what the true name of this place is. Rashi explains that *hodshi* means “new”, and so the place is called New Tachtim. Likely this is not so much a formal name for a city, but rather a way to describe a newly settled area. The Greek Septuagint takes the approach that this is referring to someplace in the large territory of Bashan. Probably both Rashi and the Septuagint are correct.

From there Joab bends to the northwest to a place in the territory of Dan called *Ya’an* that was located at the foot of Mt. Hermon. This would mark the northernmost boundary of Israel for the time being. Recall that Dan had moved there many years earlier from the area they had originally been assigned by Moses and Joshua. Their original territory was located on the western side of central Canaan and they migrated north because they couldn’t overcome the Philistines. After that the census team traveled across what today is called the Upper Galilee along the border with Sidon and on to the fortress of *Tzor*.

From there it gets pretty hazy. There is this strange reference to “the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites” that has frustrated historians and Bible scholars because not a single specific city is listed. No matter the route makes it clear that these cities are all in the northern part of the Promised Land. But it seems logical that this is referring to the conditions that are discussed back in Judges 1:27 – 35, where there is a list of towns that had been left unconquered in various districts that had been assigned to the 12 Israelite tribes. This also seems to answer the mystery of what ever became of those Canaanite and Hivite cities in this list, and explains that while for perhaps 2 centuries or so these cities had remained independent from Israel (but more or less friendly on friendly terms with Israel), that by David’s day they had assimilated socially and politically into the Kingdom of Israel. So there was undoubtedly a great deal of intermarriage between these Canaanites and Hebrews, of borrowing one another’s customs, of adopting elements of one another’s worship practices and therefore respecting one another’s gods. While that has all the nice sounding aspects of various peoples coming together in peace and harmony in a multi-cultural understanding, the reality is that Israel’s worship of Yehoveh was greatly corrupted and it would eventually result in God expelling the Northern Kingdom from the land as a consequence.

Verse 6 explains that the census workers ended in Judah at Be’er Sheva, which is the traditional southernmost city of the Kingdom of Judah and therefore the unified monarchy under King David. Then we’re told that it took 9 months and 20 days to accomplish this census. It is rare that the Bible is ever so specific about time so one has to wonder if there is something underlying the reason for giving us such precise information. The ancient Hebrew Sages point out that the correlation we probably ought to see is that this is the same amount of time as normal human gestation. Remembering that a lunar month is a bit shorter than a

modern day calendar month, we wind up with a timeframe of about 294 days, or 42 weeks. Although the number quoted regularly in modern times is 40 weeks of pregnancy for a human female, that is really just the average pregnancy period since the beginning of the modern Industrial age. Medically speaking the historical period of maximum nominal human gestation period is said to be 42 weeks, the same amount of time as the census was said to have taken. So the idea can only be that the evil that was conceived in David's mind and gestated until it gave birth to catastrophe is likened to the conception of a child that then gestates until it breaks out of the womb and into the world. We of course find this similar birth metaphor used in describing Christians as being re-born, and then of the coming End Times day of the Lord equated to a woman who is at first in the pains of labor that signals the beginning of the final stage of a process that is unstoppable and inevitable.

The results of the census are reported as 800,000 in Israel and 500,000 in Judah, for a combined total of 1.3 million. However this number is NOT the total population of Israel but merely of the men of military age that is generally from around 17 to 50 years of age. So a conservative multiplier of about 5 to account for males under 17 but over 50, and those who are in some way not suitable for military service, plus all the many females from infant to elderly, slave to free, married, widowed and single, ill or well. That tells us that Israel was probably a nation of around 6.5 million souls or something well over double that which had entered Israel under Joshua.

Nonetheless this figure is quite at odds with the parallel account of the census from 1Chronicles 21. There is totals are 1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 for Judah, giving us 1.57 million males of military age. Even more the Chronicles account tells us that Joab did not count Levi or Benjamin. So if this is the more correct number then Israel's population was probably well over 8 million. It is rather easy to understand why Levi wasn't counted because long ago they were separated away from Israel by Yehoveh and were no longer to be counted among their brethren. This happened when the priesthood was established, and of course the Levites were also exempt from military service as an automatic result of not being part of Israel any longer.

But why wasn't Benjamin counted? Since the Scriptures don't tell us, anything at all would be speculation. It could be as simple as what is mentioned about Benjamin in 1Chronicles 21.

^{CJB} **1 Chronicles 21:6** *But he didn't count Levi and Binyamin among them, because the king's order was hateful to Yo'av.*

In other words, Joab at some point stopped counting because he was so upset with the whole concept of a census; and he apparently stopped before he counted Benjamin. So very likely even though some behind the scenes politics occurred in this regard, it essentially amounts to Joab just not wanting to count Benjamin.....so he didn't. Thus some Rabbis say that the 1.1 million figure for Israel is taken from another tradition whereby David sent someone not so reluctant to count Benjamin (after the census was completed), and the 1.1 million number includes Benjamin and perhaps even Levi. I don't find that very credible because it is unimaginable that Benjamin had regenerated so sufficiently since they had been nearly made extinct due slaughter of the Benjamite men that resulted from the incident of the concubine at Gibeah; and while in some ways I can imagine David ignoring the commandment not to count Levi, I can't imagine the Levite population being so large as to add 300,000 to the census number. So the bottom line is that I don't know why this discrepancy exists and neither does anyone else. It could be (and likely is) simply a copyist error in either 2nd Samuel or 1Chronicles, but we have no way of knowing which one is the correct one.

Now that the census process was over, David suddenly realizes what he's done and he confessed his sin to the Lord. So typical of David, the man after God's own heart, he has run exceptionally cold by doing what was wrong and now he runs exceptionally hot by admitting his trespass. He repents without excuse. Most English translations say that David's heart (his *leb*) struck him, and this is quite literally what it says from the original Hebrew. The problem is that in Biblical days, the heart was seen as the center of intellect and morality, not of emotion. So because modern Western Believers think of the brain as the seat of intellect and morality, and the heart as the seat of emotion, we assume that David felt the emotion of guilt, and that would be wrong. The idea is better expressed in the CJB where David's conscience, his moral intellect, realized on a conscious level that he had done a foolish and wrong thing.

The foolishness of his actions was validated when, the next morning, the Prophet Gad shows up in front of David with a message directly from the Lord. Since David has already admitted his guilt to the great cosmic judge YHWH there is no point of a trial so the matters goes directly to the penalty phase. And in an unexpected and unprecedented action, the Lord allows David to choose his punishment from among 3 options and on the surface it seems as though He was playing the heavenly version of a popular game show.

Behind door #1 was a 7 year famine; behind door #2 was that David would flee from his enemies for 3 months; and behind door #3 was a plague upon the entire land. Why such a strange procedure? Probably this was a test of some sort to see if David would choose as wisely in accordance with the Torah commandments as he previously chose unwisely in unlawfully ordering a census. David says that these are all terrible choices and so he'd rather give the choice back to God and suffer whatever the Lord chooses. Besides, says David, the Lord is merciful and he is hoping for mercy.

It shouldn't surprise us that the great Lawgiver would choose to place upon David exactly the Torah prescribed penalty pronounced back in Exodus 30. An improper census brings a plague. Immediately it starts and 70,000 Israelites die in a matter of hours, and it affects every corner of the land from the Dan to Be'er Sheva (that is from the northernmost point to the southernmost). But when the plague was about to devastate Jerusalem Yehoveh stopped it. A couple of points: first, the term used for the 70,000 people who died was **'am**, and **'am** refers to God's people and no one else. Thus the ONLY people who died were the redeemed Israelites, not any of the pagans who still lived in the land.

It is an interesting reality that God's laws and commands in one sense apply only to God's worshippers; that is, the Torah is not for pagans so in general they are not held to account for violating it. And this is because since they are not God's people, they are already condemned. Further to be a non-Believer and obey God's commandments in a mechanical way in hopes of obtaining a benefit is a fruitless effort. Only those who trust the Lord are obligated to follow God's commands, and only those who trust and obey benefit from such obedience.

Here we once again run into the troublesome term the Angel of the Lord (***Malach Yehoveh***). Usually the Angel of the Lord is the Lord Himself and we see Him speaking in the 1st person (I, me). But here we have Yehoveh giving orders to this Angel of the Lord. No doubt this time the point of the term is to make it clear that this is NOT a human messenger (like a prophet) who has his hand outstretched over Jerusalem, but rather is a heavenly messenger (an angel) sent by YHWH. And this angel is sent to destroy. But the Lord refuses to allow Jerusalem to be touched because He has elected it to be the home of His Temple. And so in His divine mercy Yehoveh limits the duration of the plague before it can run its full course.

It is now clear from this story that the Lord used David's sin (emanating from his own evil inclination) as a vehicle to exact punishment on the people of Israel for their sin. The plague that is a result of David's sin of ordering a census is used to punish the **'am** of Israel for their (unnamed) sin.

Most Bible translations will say in verse 16 something to the effect that the Lord repented of His evil and did not destroy the people of Jerusalem. The CJB far better captures the sense by saying, "Adonai changed his mind about causing distress". The Hebrew word ***rah*** means evil in the sense of wicked, but also in the sense of calamity or distress (since in the ancient world all calamity was seen as supernaturally caused).

The New Testament offers an interesting parallel to this action of God in the Book of Mark.

READ MARK 13:14 – 20

Here we see that as Yeshua is standing in Yerushalayim, speaking about what is going to be happening in Yerushalayim at some time in the future, He speaks of God stopping a horrific but divinely ordained calamity for the sake of His elect, and doing so before the duration of the calamity was appointed to finish. This is very much after the pattern we just read in 2nd Samuel 24.

The remainder of this chapter explains how the site for the Temple of God was chosen. And it was that the very spot where the destroying angel stood upon Araunah's threshing floor that the Temple Mount was to be built. It is a wonderful reality and prophetic symbolism: the Temple would be where atonement could be made for God's people and thus God's wrath upon them stayed. The Temple would be located at the same place that Abraham took his son Isaac, bound him, and was about to offer him up as a sacrifice when God stopped him. The Temple is the place where the supernatural punishment that people were due for their trespasses could be ordered by the Father to cease. It is important to notice that the Jebusites were the original builders and inhabitants of the City of David, and thus Araunah, the land owner, is a gentile.

And when the Prophet Gad came to David and told him to set up an altar to Yehoveh on that place, David personally went to Araunah and asked to buy the land from him. Araunah was shocked that David came to him rather than merely summoning him to the king's Palace. And when David asked to buy the land in order to build an altar the Jebusite responded by offering to give David the oxen for the sacrifice as well as the wooden threshing sled and oxen's yoke for the altar fire (and in fact those animals were used as the sacrifice). But notice that he did NOT offer to donate the land to David. David then proposed a price and Araunah accepted it and now the stage was set for the building of God's house on earth. It is fascinating that just as the conditions for the construction for the first Temple on Mt. Moriah was a co-operative venture between Jew and gentile, so it will be for the last Temple.

^{CJB} ***Zechariah 6:15 Those who are now far away will come and help rebuild the temple of ADONAI." Then you will know that it is ADONAI-Tzva'ot who sent me to you. And it will***

all come about, provided you heed carefully what ADONAI your God says."

David built the altar, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings and the plague stopped entirely.

So ends our study of 2nd Samuel. Next week: the Book of Kings.