

The Ideal United Kingdom (1 Chronicles 9:35 – 2 Chronicles 9:31)

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David Prepares for the Temple, part 6: David Discovers the Temple Site (1 Chronicles 21:1–22:1)

David Discovers the Temple Site (21:1-22:1)

The Chronicler has noted how David accepted his role as one to prepare for the temple (17:1-27); he has also explained how David's wars established security and materials for the temple (see 18:1-20:8). In this chapter the Chronicler recorded how David discovered the location of the temple. This discovery established a particular spot in Jerusalem as the only legitimate place of worship and sacrifice in the future, a vital fact for the post-exilic community.

This passage stands out from the rest of the Chronicler's portrait of David's reign in that it concentrates on David's major sin. For the most part, the Chronicler omitted David's failures in favor of focusing on his exemplary accomplishments (see *Part Two: Overview of the United Kingdom*). As we will see, however, the Chronicler actually emphasized the severity of David's sin in this passage more than the parallel account in Samuel. In the end, however, the Chronicler turned even this event into one of David's positive achievements. The manner in which David handled his circumstances modeled the kind of behavior and attitudes expected of the post-exilic readers as they sought to restore the worship of God in Israel.

Comparison of 21:1-22:1 with 2 Sam 24:1-25

For the most part, the Chronicler closely followed the account of David's census in 2 Sam 24:1-25. A number of insignificant variations occur due to minor problems in textual transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). Yet, several differences reveal the Chronicler's unique outlook on this event in David's life.

First, Samuel begins with "again" (2 Sam 24:1a) which is omitted in Chronicles (21:1). This introductory word in Samuel related David's census to another parallel passage in Samuel (see 2 Sam 21:1-14). The Chronicler already omitted this earlier passage and therefore struck "again" from his text.

Second, Samuel opens the passage with the record that God Himself "incited David" (2 Sam 24:1a). The Chronicler, however, wrote **Satan rose up against Israel and incited David** (21:1). The Chronicler clarified that God's anger against Israel came through the instrumentality of Satan.

Third, the Chronicler reduced "Israel and Judah" (2 Sam 24:2) to **Israel** (21:2). This change reflected his outlook that David reigned over one nation including all the tribes of Israel (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Fourth, in 21:2 the Chronicler changed "from Dan to Beersheba" (2 Sam 24:2) to **from Beersheba to Dan**. The expression "from Dan to Beersheba" (i.e. from North to South) is found many times in the Old Testament (see Jdg 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; 2 Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2,15). The Chronicler, however, reversed the formula to "**from Beersheba to Dan**" (i.e. South to North) in three places (see 2 Chr 19:4; 30:5). This shift reflected the Chronicler's conviction that Jerusalem and Judah were the center of post-exilic hopes.

Fifth, at least three features of the Chronicler's text heightened attention to David's sin. 1) The Chronicler added to Joab's objection, "**Why should he (David) bring guilt on Israel?**" (21:3). 2) In 21:4 the Chronicler omitted 2 Sam 24:4b-8, thus removing the specific locations of Joab's itinerary. He then changed "the entire land" (2 Sam 24:5a) to his usual term **all Israel** to summarize the range of Joab's activity (21:4b). By this means, David's sin is shown to involve the entire nation, not just certain parts of it. 3) The Chronicler added to David's admission of guilt, "**Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who has sinned ...**" (21:17). 4) Some ancient texts of Samuel suggest that 21:6-7a (// 2 Sam 24:9-10) may have been lost from Samuel through textual transmission (*Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). If so, it should not be considered as an addition by the Chronicler. However, if it was added by the Chronicler, it points once again to the severity of David's sin by more clearly indicating God's displeasure with David's actions. 5) The Chronicler expanded 21:12 (// 2 Sam 24:13) to emphasize that the **angel of the Lord [was] destroying throughout all the territory of Israel**. In so doing, the Chronicler drew more attention to the divine anger in response to David's sin.

Sixth, 21:12 has **three years of famine**, but 2 Sam 24:13 reads "seven years of famine" (see NIV marginal note). This variation probably occurred by corruption of Samuel through textual transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*).

Seventh, at first glance 21:16,20 appear to be added in Chronicles. Yet, recent discoveries of ancient Hebrew texts of Samuel suggest strongly that the material in Chronicles originally appeared in Samuel but was lost from Samuel through textual transmission (*Introduction: Translation and Transmission*).

Eighth, the differences in the numbers of the census (1.1 million - Israel; 470,000 - Judah [1 Chr 21:5]; 800,000 - Israel; 500,000 - Judah [2 Sam 24:9]) probably result from corruption through textual transmission or differences in standards of calculation between the writer of Samuel and the Chronicler (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*).

Ninth, 21:25 reads **six hundred shekels of gold** which is significantly more than "fifty shekels of silver" (2 Sam 24:24). It is possible that the Chronicler intentionally used hyperbole here. (For the Chronicler's use of hyperbole see comments on 12:14.) Yet, it seems better to suppose that Samuel focuses on payment for "the threshing floor and the oxen" (2 Sam 24:24). The Chronicler, however, was probably concerned with a much larger purchase, **the site** (i.e. the entire land required for Solomon's temple which was much larger than the threshing floor). Perhaps David bought the area in several stages and the Chronicler gave the final sum.

Tenth, the most significant difference is the Chronicler's addition at the end of the narrative (21:26b-22:1). Several important elements appear in this addition. 1) David **called on the Lord and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering** (21:26b). As we will see, this scene confirms God's pleasure with David's discovery. 2) The Chronicler explained why David **sacrificed there** instead of following Mosaic instructions (21:28-30). 3) The most significant factor of this addition is David's explicit expression of discovery (22:1). He had found the place where the temple was to be built. This final element explained the primary way this narrative functions within the Chronicler's record of David's ideal reign.

Structure of 21:1-22:1

This episode divides into four large sections, each of which breaks into a number of smaller units (see figure 16). The drama begins with David's sinful census sparking divine displeasure (21:1-7a) and ends with David discovering the site of Solomon's temple because God showed mercy toward him (21:28-22:1). This movement from judgment to mercy took place through two intervening steps. David reacted to God's punishment against the nation (21:7b-14). Then David reacted to God's punishment against Jerusalem (21:15-27). These central episodes balance with each other in many ways. Both begin with God's judgment (21:7b,15); David reacted with an inquiry (21:8,16-18); God instructed David (21:9-12,18); David complied (21:13,19-26a), and received a response from God (21:14,26b-27).

David's Cursed Infidelity (21:1-7)

This narrative begins with a description of David's sinful census and God's negative response. This portion balances with David's blessed devotion at the end of this chapter (21:28-22:1; see figure 16).

Structure of 21:1-7

The opening portion of this chapter divides into five symmetrical steps (see figure 16). The beginning and ending of this material focuses on heavenly realities which incite (21:1) and react to (21:7a) earthly events. The rising and falling action of the story balance each other. David orders a census (21:2-3) and receives a report of the census (2:5-6). The turning point of this episode is Joab's fulfillment of David's desire (21:4).

David Misled by Satan (21:1)

This remarkable story opens with the statement that **Satan rose up ... and incited David to take a census of Israel** (21:1). The Chronicler varied from 2 Sam 24:1 ("the anger of the Lord") to clarify that God did not directly tempt David to sin; he did this through the instrumentality of **Satan** (21:1).

The name **Satan** appears in the Old Testament in only three passages as a reference to an evil, angelic being (see Job 1:6-2:10; Zech 3:1). In Hebrew his name means "the accuser" and indicates one of the special roles this creature played in the heavenly court. Satan brought charges against the people of God. As the story of Job illustrates so clearly, one of his duties as "accuser" was to tempt and test human beings. Much more attention is given to Satan in the New Testament. For example, the Greek transliteration of "Satan" occurs 34 times and the word "devil" appears 36 times. The New Testament makes it clear that Satan had such power over the nations that he was called the "ruler of this world" (see Jn 12:31; 14:30). Though he and his demonic cohorts were disarmed by Christ (see Col 2:15), he is still active and tries to thwart the purposes of God. Thus, he persecutes Christians (see Rev 2:10), places counterfeit Christians in the church (see Mt 13:24-30) and abuses Christians who are vulnerable to temptation (see Mt 26:41; 1 Pet 5:8-9). Satan hinders (see 1 Thess 2:18) and buffets believers (see 2 Cor 12:7). Although God himself tempts no one (see Jas 1:13), God gives Satan permission to test believers (see Mt 4:1-10; Lk 22:31-32; Rev 2:10).

Satan incited David **to take a census of Israel** (21:1 // 2 Sam 24:1 "Israel and Judah"). The Chronicler noted later that this census only included men older than twenty (27:23). We learn later that David's actions angered Joab (21:6) and God (21:7). It is

difficult to know precisely what was wrong with David's census. It is evident that taking a census was not wrong in itself. Moses used a census to collect contributions for the tabernacle (see Ex 30:11-16). Moses also numbered all of the firstborn of Israel (see Num 3:40-43). Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 contain the numbers of various groups. For other census reported in Chronicles see 1 Chr 27:23-24 and 2 Chr 2:17.

David's action was sinful probably because of his motivations. The purpose of his census was to assess military strength. David gave orders to **Joab and the commanders of the troops** (21:2); Joab's report focused on **fighting men** (21:5). David's desire for a military census may have expressed a growing dissatisfaction with reliance on divine power in battle. Like many kings after him, David began to turn from trust in God to trust in his armies.

Later in this passage Joab refused to count the men of Levi (and Benjamin) (21:6); his exception suggests that David may have even ordered the counting of Levi for military purposes. If this was the case, it reveals David's disregard for the Law of Moses (see Num 1:49) and his disinterest in having the Lord care for his military needs. This evil motivation may explain why Joab objected so strongly.

David Orders Census (21:2-3)

In all events, David ordered Joab to take a census (21:2-3). The king wanted to know the count of all potential fighters **from Beersheba to Dan** (21:2). As noted above, the Chronicler reversed the more common expression in 2 Sam 24:2 ("from Dan to Beersheba") as he did elsewhere (see 2 Chr 30:5; compare 2 Chr 19:4). By placing the southern region first, he indicated his special focus on the South as the heart of the nation.

Although Joab objected to David's command, he demonstrated his support for David's throne by introducing his objection with a blessing: **May the Lord multiply** [David's] **troops** (21:3). Similarly, no less than three times, Joab addressed David as **my lord** (21:3).

Nevertheless, Joab's response revealed the Chronicler's negative outlook on David's actions. He added that Joab asked, "**Are they not all my lord's servants?**" (21:3) The Lord had already put the entire nation at David's disposal. In much the same way, the Chronicler also added that Joab objected, "**Why should he bring guilt on Israel?**" (21:3).

Joab's charge is enlarged in Chronicles to explain why God reacted so strongly to what may appear to have been a mere peccadillo. From his point of view, failure to trust the Lord in military matters was a serious violation to be avoided by his readers. As they faced military threats all around them, they must not turn to human strength as David did.

Joab Fulfills Census (21:4)

Despite his objections, Joab fulfilled David's order (21:4). He **left and ... came back to Jerusalem**. His itineration forms the turning point of this episode.

David Receives Census (21:5-6)

Joab returned with the **number of fighting men** (21:4-5). The numbers in Chronicles (21:5) appear significantly larger than in 2 Sam 24:9. **One million one hundred thousand ... and four hundred and seventy thousand** are very large for this context (21:5). Several interpretive options are possible. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 12:24-37.) It is possible that the Chronicler intentionally employed hyperbole to depict the enormity of David's military might. (For the Chronicler's use of hyperbole see comments on 12:14.) Mentioning large and skilled armies is one way in which the Chronicler often exalted faithful kings (see 1 Chr 12:24-40; 21:15; 27:1-15; 2 Chr 12:3; 13:3-4,17; 14:9; 17:12-19; 25:5-6; 26:13; 28:6-8). It is also possible, however, that these numbers may have been corrupted through textual transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*).

The text gives special attention to the fact that **Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin** (21:6). The Chronicler noted the limits of Joab's census in 27:24a. Mosaic legislation forbade the counting of Levi for military service (see Num 1:49). The reason for omitting Benjamin, however, is not clear. Joab initially resisted the king's order and made sure not to violate Mosaic Law. For this reason, only David could be blamed for the terrible results that came upon the nation.

David Angers God (21:7a)

The closing scene of this episode introduces the horror with which the rest of this narrative must deal. David's sin was **evil in the sight of God** (21:7a). Just as this episode began with a glimpse of heavenly realities influencing earthly action (see 21:1), so it ends with a heavenly reaction to earthly action. God strongly disapproved of what David had done.

David's Confrontation with God over Israel (21:7b-14)

The story of David's census moves next to David's encounter with God concerning the entire nation (21:7b-14). This material balances with the king's encounter over Jerusalem (21:15-27; see figure 16).

Structure of 21:7b-14

This portion of the chapter divides into five symmetrical steps (see figure 16). This passage begins and ends with David under God's punishment (21:7b,14). The turning point is the revelation by Gad (21:9-12). Prior to this revelation, David humbly inquires (21:8); afterwards, he humbly complies (21:13).

David Punished by God (21:7b)

The Chronicler began with the simple note that God **punished Israel** (21:7b). The nature of this punishment is not altogether clear at this point, but the dramatic tension of the passage is evident. The entire nation was suffering divine displeasure because of David's sin. In the Old Testament, kings had a special representative function before God. Their righteous deeds often brought blessings to the nation, but their sins also brought wrath on the entire nation (see 1 Kgs 18:16-18; 2 Chr 16:7-9; 1 Kgs 21:10-15; 2 Kgs 19:20-36; 2 Kgs 20:6).

David's Humble Inquiry (21:8)

In response to divine displeasure against Israel, David confessed, "**I have sinned greatly**," and asked for forgiveness (21:8). David admitted that he had done **a very foolish thing** (21:8). Although these words come from the parallel account in Samuel, they coincided with the Chronicler's perspective on this event. David's rejection of God as his military security was contrary to wisdom derived from national experiences of the past (see Deut 2:32-37; 3:1-7; Josh 6:1-21; 8:1-17; 10:6-15; 10:28-43; 11:1-9; Jdg 7:1-8:12) and from David's own military encounters (see 18:1-20:8).

David's Instructions from Gad (21:9-12)

In response to David's humility, God spoke to **Gad, David's seer** (21:9). Gad appears several times in this chapter and elsewhere in the Chronicler's history. He

provided David with prophetic counsel after the king first fled from Saul as a young man (see 1 Sam 22:5). He advised on the proper arrangement of Levitical music in worship (see 2 Chr 29:25). He is also credited with having written a record of David's actions (see 1 Chr 29:29).

The tension of this episode rises as Gad first received the word of God (21:9-10) and then reported it to David (21:11-12). David was offered a choice of three kinds of chastisement. 1) **three years of famine**, 2) **three months ... before your enemies**, or 3) **three days of the sword of the Lord** (21:12).

At first glance, it may seem that the chastisement of lesser time (**three days**) was the lightest sentence, but the severity of this option is revealed in the explanation that follows. It would consist of a **plague in the land**, and **the angel of the Lord ravaging every part of Israel** (21:12). The potential of this option was great. Indeed, 70,000 men fell dead and Jerusalem itself came near utter destruction (see 21:14-15).

David's Humble Compliance (21:13)

Despite its horrible potential, David chose punishment directly from God. His reasoning was remarkable and indicated a significant shift of disposition. When ordering the census, David displayed distrust in God. Now he selected chastisement from God because he believed God's **mercy is very great** (21:13). David's trust in God had been renewed.

David Punished by God (21:14)

God's response to David was true to his threat. He **sent a plague and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead** (21:14). Despite his repentance, David had to suffer a period of severe consequence for his violation of trust in the Lord. By including this fact in his account, the Chronicler reminded his post-exilic readers that they too had suffered many consequences for rebellion against God (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

David's Confrontation with God over Jerusalem (21:15-27)

At this point, the narrative narrows its outlook from the whole nation to Jerusalem. In balance with 21:7b-14, the text repeats a scenario of inquiry and divine response (see figure 16).

Structure of 21:15-27

This portion of the chapter also divides into a five-step symmetrical pattern (see figure 16). At first, David receives punishment (21:15), but this punishment ends with the final step (21:26b-27). Again, the revelation from Gad forms the turning point (21:18). David humbly inquires of God (21:16-17) and humbly complies (21:19-26a).

David Punished by God (21:15)

In this section of the chapter, the spatial framework narrows from the entire countryside to **Jerusalem** (21:15). God **sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem**, i.e. to extend the plague to Jerusalem (21:15). Yet, just as David had hoped (21:13), at the last moment God was merciful and ordered the angel to **withdraw** (21:15).

The spatial focus of the narrative narrows further when the angel arrives **at the threshing floor of Araunah** (21:15). **Araunah** was a Jebusite whose name is spelled "Ornan" in the Hebrew of Chronicles (see NAS, NRS, NKJ), but is spelled "Araunah" in Samuel (see 2 Sam 24:16,18,20,21-24). He owned a threshing floor and its surrounding properties in the vicinity of Jerusalem. This geographical site became the chief concern of the rest of this section.

David's Humble Inquiry (21:16-17)

As God ordered his angel to stop, David saw the angel with **a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem** (21:16). The angel paused to wait for a final decision from God as to whether Jerusalem would be destroyed. As a result, **David and the elders clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown** (21:16). Sackcloth was clothing made from goat or camel hair. It was sometimes worn as a loincloth (see Gen 37:34) or as an outer garment (see 2 Kgs 19:1). Sackcloth was also worn during times of sorrow and mourning in grievous conditions (see 2 Sam 21:10; Esther 4:1). Similarly, as is evident in this passage, sackcloth was used to express sorrow and repentance because of sin (see Neh 9:1).

David asked for mercy a second time (21:17-18; see 21:8). This time, however, his heart turned from concern for his own well-being to the interests of the nation. He confessed, "**Was it not I ... ? I am the one ...**" (21:17). David pled with God to treat this matter as his own personal offense. He then asked God to show mercy to the nation and offered himself as a substitute. "**Let your hand fall upon me and my family**" (21:17). Those words revealed the depth of David's contrition.

This portion of the episode spoke to the post-exilic community in a number of ways. Those who led the people of God in the Chronicler's day were to see David's example as a model of attitudes and behaviors they should have in their own day. They had turned from God as David; they had been punished as David. Now they sought to be restored. The way of restoration appeared in David's sincere contrition.

David's Instructions from Gad (21:18)

In response to David's profound repentance, the **angel of the Lord** told **Gad** to have David build an altar **on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite** (21:18). Sacrifices had to be made before relief from guilt could come to the nation.

David's Humble Compliance (21:19-26a)

David complied with the directive given **in the name of the Lord** (21:19; see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*) and purchased the threshing floor. Several aspects of this account allude to Abraham's purchase of a burial site for Sarah (see Gen 23:3-20). Araunah offered to give the land, but David insisted on buying it. The reason for David's insistence is stated explicitly. He argued, "**I will not take for the Lord what is yours**" (21:24). Moreover, as he explained, he would not "**sacrifice a burnt offering that costs [him] nothing**" (21:24). Once again, the passage emphasizes David's sincerity and desire to give of himself in payment for his sin.

Once the property was purchased, David **built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings** (21:26). David took the necessary steps for the return of harmony and peace between himself and God.

In 21:26a, the Chronicler began to diverge significantly from the account of Samuel (// 2 Sam 24:25). For the most part he added information not found in Samuel. One prominent feature of the Chronicler's addition is that during the sacrificial rituals, David **called on the Lord**, asking for God's forgiveness and help (21:26a).

David's actions in this passage were exemplary for the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. They were to respond appropriately to prophetic instruction, acknowledge their guilt, prepare for proper worship, and invoke God's help. Despite David's failure in this passage, in the end he served as a model of righteousness.

David Forgiven by God (21:26b-27)

The Chronicler also added that in response to David's sacrifices and prayer, God sent **fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering** (21:26b). The descent of fire onto the altar took place in the Old Testament only three other times (see Lev 9:24; 1 Kgs 18:38; 2 Chr 7:1; see also Jdg 6:21;). On each occasion it displayed extraordinary pleasure from God toward his people. The Chronicler added this element to his account of David's census in order to highlight God's approval of David. The fire from heaven demonstrated that God enthusiastically approved of David's sacrifices.

The Chronicler skillfully balanced the end of this passage with its beginning. In 21:16 the angel stood with sword drawn over Jerusalem. In 21:27, the angel **put his sword back into its sheath**. The Chronicler added this note to make it clear that the chastisement of Israel was over.

As we have seen, 21:7b-14 and 21:15-27 are parallel in many ways (see figure 16), but the end of the episodes are strikingly different. Instead of sending chastisement against Israel a second time, God forgave David. This contrast spoke plainly of the hope of forgiveness for the post-exilic readers. If they emulated David's humility, they too would receive this blessing.

David's Blessed Devotion (21:28-22:1)

The Chronicler's account of David's census ends with more added material. In contrasting balance with the opening of this chapter (see figure 16), these verses draw attention to the most important aspect of this passage. David came upon a great discovery: the place God ordained for the temple.

Structure of 21:28-22:1

This portion of the account divides into three steps (see figure 16). This material actually amounts to two actions: David's sacrifice (21:28) and his discovery (22:1). Between these actions is an explanatory authorial comment (21:29-30).

David Offers Sacrifices (21:28)

Once David saw that God had shown him such favor **on the threshing floor of Araunah**, he **offered sacrifices there** (21:28). The concern of this verse is not so much with the fact that David sacrificed, but on the place where he sacrificed. David did

something extraordinary. He sacrificed at a place that had not been approved beforehand by God. In fact, a pedantic application of Mosaic Law would have ruled his actions illegitimate. The Chronicler began his description of this new place for sacrifice by noting that it was not until David saw God's grace bestowed at this place that he sacrificed there.

David's Actions Explained (21:29-30)

The Chronicler paused to give an authorial comment explaining further why David had not sacrificed at the tabernacle. This matter was important to him because he normally held both David and the Law of Moses as his standards of righteousness. Now one standard seemed to conflict with the other (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*). Earlier, the Chronicler noted that the Levites serving in Jerusalem away from the Tabernacle only served by playing music. Sacrificial duties were performed in Gibeon (see comments on 16:4-6). The Chronicler admitted that **the tabernacle ... and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon** (21:29). In the strictest sense, David should have made his sacrifices there, but his circumstances were very unusual. As the Chronicler explained, David **was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord** (21:30). In other words, David was in an emergency situation and had to appease divine anger as quickly as possible. As in other incidents, the Chronicler showed himself not to be a pedantic legalist. Priorities arising from particular circumstances often led to the approval of unusual and otherwise prohibited behavior (compare 2 Chr 5:11-12; 30:2).

David Declares His Discovery (22:1)

David drew a conclusion from his encounter with God. He had seen **that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor** (21:28). Therefore, he concluded, "**The house of the Lord God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel**" (22:1). David now understood that the threshing floor of Araunah was to be the site for Solomon's temple.

In these closing words from David, the Chronicler established the central place of worship for Israel even in his own day. Despite the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, its central role as the place of worship was still in effect in post-exilic times. David's example confirmed the Chronicler's concern with re-establishing the temple in Jerusalem. The site was blessed by God as the place of sacrifice.