

David Was Tempted by Satan to Number the People

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David Was Tempted by the Lord to Number
Israel
(*2 Samuel 24:1*)

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People
(*1Chronicles 21:1*)

God knows the inner thoughts and motives of mankind and, one way or another, He warns people about the consequences of sin should their thoughts turn into actions that are against His law and commandments (1 Sam. 16:7b; 1Chr. 28:9b; Jer. 17:10a; 20:12a). One of the main reasons God has preserved His word, in a written form, is to provide examples of the "cause and effect" relationship that occurs when people choose to break His commands (Mt. 4:4; 1Jn. 3:4; Rom. 6:23; see study: Satan's Removal and the Sabbath Rest). If people insist on going against God's word, He will allow them to learn lessons the hard way. As long as an individual lives contrary to God and His word, they are separated from Him and open to the influence of Satan (Isa. 59:2; cf. Rev. 12:9; 2Cor. 4:4). Even individuals that God calls to serve and obey Him can fall into error and sin, if they are not diligent (1Tim. 4:14; Heb. 2:3). This is what happened to King David when he succumbed to sin during his life, but he repented and was forgiven. The process that can lead to sin and separation from God is explained in a simple example in the opening pages of Genesis. In this scenario, Adam's firstborn son, Cain, was angry at his brother Abel and instead of controlling his emotions he murdered his brother (see study: Anger). Prior to Cain carrying out this act of violence, God warned him to take corrective

action quickly, or else he was going to open himself up to Satan's influence.

So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen (i.e. his anger was written all over his face)? ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted (obedience results in a positive outcome sooner or later)? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door (refusal to do what is right opens the door and provides an opportunity for Satan's influence). And its desire (in the person of Satan; cf. 1Pet. 5:8) is for (toward) you, but you should rule over it (i.e. resist giving into our selfish human nature; cf. Jas. 1:13-15)'. ⁸Now Cain (ignored God's advice) talked with (said to) Abel his brother (LXX, Syr., Vg. add – *let us go out to the field*), and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him (Gen. 6-8; Ed. notes in parentheses; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

So a negative thought, like Cain had for his brother, can grow to the point that an individual is no longer in control of themselves, despite warnings from others, and then they are open to Satan's influence. This process hasn't changed in mankind's history and won't as long as mankind entertains ungodly thoughts without exercising self-control.


For the weapons of our (God's servants) warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the Page 2 knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity (self-control) to the obedience of Christ, ⁶and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled (2Cor. 10:4- 6; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

It is with this background that King David's sin will now be examined.

Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number (take a census of) Israel (1Chr. 21:1).

Although this last scripture is accurate, there is another account that seems to contradict it. Before going to that account, it is important to examine David's motives because taking a census of God's people without His specific command was a presumptuous sin.

These are the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered **according to the commandment of the Lord** (Nu. 4:41; cf. Nu. 1:1-2, 49; 3:15, 40, 48; 4:23, 29-30; emphasis added).



THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD TO ZERUBBABEL; 'NOT BY (PHYSICAL) MIGHT NOR BY (PHYSICAL) POWER, BUT BY MY (GOD'S) SPIRIT, 'SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS.

Zechariah 4:6; Ed. notes in parentheses' emphasis added

According to a number of Bible commentators, David appears to have slipped momentarily into relying on physical strength, in numbers, rather than on Almighty God.

'The true kernel of David's sin was to be found, no doubt, in self-exaltation, inasmuch as he sought for the strength and glory of his kingdom in the number of people and their readiness for war' (K. & D., Com., 2 Sam. 24:1-9; quoted from 'The New Unger's Bible Dictionary' p 216).

'The worst thing in numbering the people was that David did it in the pride of his heart, which was Hezekiah's sin in showing his treasures to the ambassadors. It was a proud conceit of his own greatness, or strength, in having the

command of so numerous a people. By publishing among the nations the number of his people, he thought to appear more formidable' (The Matthew Henry Commentary; p 360).

So David lapsed into a false belief that his might, and subsequent success, could be measured by physical manpower rather than total reliance upon God.

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel; 'Not by (physical) might nor by (physical) power, but by **My (God's) Spirit, 'says the Lord of hosts** (Zech. 4:6; Ed. notes in parentheses' emphasis added).

It was during this period in David's life that he was vulnerable to the advances of Satan, and God warned him through Joab, his army commander, but he did not heed the advice any more than Cain had done in the Genesis account.

And Joab said to the king (David), 'Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundredfold more than there are (already), and may the eyes of my lord the king see it (in his lifetime). But **why does my lord the king desire this thing?**' ⁴Nevertheless the king's word prevailed (overruled) against Joab and against the captains of the army... (2 Sam. 24:3-4a; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Because David ignored God's counsel, given through Joab, God took a "hands off" Page 3 approach, which then opened the door for Satan. It is in this sense only that God was involved in David's actions. The following commentator confirms this fact in his interpretation of 2 Samuel 24:1.

"He (God) moved (David) = He (God) suffered him (David) to be moved (by Satan). By Hebrew idiom (and also by modern usage) a person is

said to do that which he permits to be done. Here we have the historical fact. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, we have the real fact from the Divine standpoint" (The Companion Bible, p 443; commentary on 2 Samuel 24:1).

It is interesting to note there were similarities between the attitude David had, regarding his sinful attitude and act, and that of a member in the Corinthian church during Paul's time. This individual had become complacent about a sexual relationship with his stepmother, which is against God's law (cf. Dt. 22:30). Paul admonished the brethren to deal with this man by removing him from their fellowship and leaving him open to Satan's influence in the hope he would come to his senses and repent.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife (i.e. stepmother)! ²And you (Corinthian brethren) are puffed up (arrogant), and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you (1Cor. 5:1-2; Ed. notes in parentheses).

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit (because Paul was absent from the brethren physically at that time), with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵**deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord** (1Cor. 5:4-5; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

According to Paul's later comments to the Corinthians, it appears that this man repented of his sin and was restored to fellowship. King David also repented and was restored in his relationship with God (cf. 2 Sam. 24:10),

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you (regarding the sinful man), with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love (expressed by Paul's concern) which I have so abundantly for you. ⁵But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent – not to be too severe. ⁶This punishment which was inflicted by the majority (by removing the sinner from fellowship) is sufficient for such a man, ⁷so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him (2Cor. 2:4- 8; Ed. notes in parentheses).

King David was not tempted by God because God does not tempt anyone. However, anyone who determines to walk contrary to God's word is in a position where Satan can influence them to commit sin.

Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is drawn away (from doing God's will) by his own (selfish) desires and enticed (by Satan). ¹⁵Then, when desire has conceived (rather than resisted; cf. Jas. 4:7), it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown (into a sinful act), brings forth death (Jas. 1:13-15; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So only in the sense that God did not prevent Satan from influencing David, did He Page 4 allow David to be "drawn away by his own desires and enticed (Jas. 1:14)." Therefore, there is no contradiction between 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1. Instead, David's temptation was due to his selfish desires and God allowed him to learn a lesson the hard way, which has been the course that mankind had chosen since Adam and Eve's sin.

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