



**“Coming to your Census”**  
*...from hubris to humility*  
**-2 Samuel 24-**

**by Pastor Tim Dodson**  
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David the king once wrote in Psalms 20, verse 7 that *“some trust in horses and some in chariots, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.”* The premise is sound and the principle exemplary, but David failed to follow through with that idea when he found himself under pressure. Maybe the events of 2 Samuel 24 happened *before* he wrote that psalm, or maybe he, *like so many of us*, had a “disconnect” between what he said and what he did!

Just what had incited God’s anger against his people *as per verse 1*, we don’t know. But such a passage stands in stark contrast to a modern church that wants to paint a picture of an all-accepting God who is imminently passive and always gentle...one where grace means God will look the other way and has no absolutes as to obedience and holiness.

The original language here says that *“Satan incited David...”* and the 1 Chronicles version of this account confirms that idea. So it was *Satan who tempted, David who agreed* out of pride, and *God who allowed it* to teach and correct David and Israel as a whole. This “trifecta” is a common combination, and occurs regularly even today in our generation.

Often we are guilty ourselves of this sin before us, in the respect that it is easy to lean upon the strengths that are at our personal disposal to get through difficult times, trials, and testing’s. Our bank account, our education, our vocation, some sort of past training or even physical strength and mental prowess. These things have little historical evidence of having deterred any **real** difficulty. There are many natural and worldly issues whose punch and trajectory fails to be altered by such a feeble human arsenal. Jeremiah 17:5 - *Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD.*

**Note Deut 8:10-20**

David...*even at this point in his life and service to God*, still had it in him to trust in himself and reject God’s oversight. We especially fail in this when our passions are high and fear is in front. And even more so when our pride is in the driver’s seat! David knew what he had done was wrong and after the sin was committed...*as we often do also*, he was overcome with remorse and regret as he sought God for forgiveness and restoration.

We all would certainly be hard-pressed to accuse our God of not being forgiving and loving. All of us have no doubt been the generous recipients of such throughout our lives. Thus when God punishes, we truly have little ground to complain. David was certainly one of those men. He had had some trials in his life, but he also literally “lived like a king” under the blessings of his Creator. And while God can and does correct any and all

of us at times, such issues of discipline and faithfulness are especially critical in those who take upon themselves the mantle of leadership. Luke 12:48 reminds us that *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

David’s move to count the people was made out of a wrong heart. Perhaps it was anger or fear, but it was definitely hubris and arrogance. He trusted in his **own** strength instead of the strength of God to protect him. Scripture is full of such descriptive titles for God like *a shield, a refuge, a hiding-place, a fortress, a stronghold, a defender, a Rock, etc.* Such monikers leave little to doubt. Factually, it was not the census *per se* that would cause him to fall but rather the heart...*the motivation*, behind what he did that made it wrong, that made it “sin.”

This fact is crucial in our understanding of the story as well as the application to our personal lives. We often can engage in positive or neutral practices and literally *make them sin* by having the wrong heart or attitude. This is the power behind 1 Corinthians 10:23 where we are told *“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable; All things are lawful,” but not all edify.”*

Joab tried to talk David down on this matter, but as often is the case, when some people get in that “zone” there is no talking to them, and there is no changing their mind. They become like a bull in a china shop, and are so self-destructive as to often endanger their very lives or legal freedoms. A hundred times I have seen people take the position that every one of the multitude of people at church are inexplicably *wrong* on an issue and “lo-and-behold” they are the only one who sees and knows the truth! I think that must be the very definition of crazy, and everyone would be best to “step away” from that person at that point because that bomb is ticking!

David pushed ahead and the census happened as planned. For over nine months David could have backed out of this action and likely would have been forgiven without much pain. He had plenty of time to bail out. But David waited essentially until the “village burned to the ground” and then had second thoughts. As I have said often, we are indeed our own worst enemy! Now, as the dust is settling, David’s regret sets in immediately, and “restitution” was in order.

God apparently gave David a choice as to his penalty. One was a “slow death”, one was a period of personal fear and brutality, and one was a “quick death.” David, having come to his senses to some degree, and having learned enough in the wisdom of age, that he knew it was always better to fall into the “hands of God” than the “hands of men.” He had experienced both over the years, and even in punishment, *he was going with God.* He trusted God to have mercy when men often have none!

Now one cannot help but recognize a very important aspect of all of this. And that is that it was *David* who committed this sin, but it was a lot of *innocent bystanders* that paid the price. Sadly, such is often the case. This is why it is so crucial that we are aware of the world around us, and forever know that no sin is committed in isolation. When we sin, we hurt a lot of people around us. And when we do so callously, one would have to question that person’s very salvation. For rebirth naturally brings an aspect of God and His nature into us: not perfect, but certainly a reality. Thus when we plow forward in our ‘knowing sin’ instead of repenting and setting it down, then scripture seems to paint a picture that you are not really born again at all. David did more than “hurt” a lot of people, he cost the lives of 70,000 of his people!

Sadly, there is always those who do indeed “burn the village down” and then *feel bad* but that’s as far as it goes. There is no attempt at repentance or restitution. We just want to quickly forget about it and move on, while everyone stands stunned and bleeding as you “walk off stage.” Such people do not love you and do not know love at all. They are the kind that says they love you but when the need arises they “throw you under the bus” or “kick you to the curb.”

But David was not one of these people and called out to God in verse 17 saying “...*I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are as innocent as sheep — what have they done? Let your anger fall against me and my family.*” I have no doubt that despite the great sins over David’s lifetime, it was **that** attribute and action that not only kept him on the throne, but caused him to be even yet remembered as the man “*after the heart of God.*”

His repentance was more than mere words, but was reflective of his humility. When it came time to erect an altar of remembrance of this event, the man who owned the land...one “Araunah”, attempted to give his king the land for free. But David would have none of that, saying “*No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.*”

In that act was the Godly exercise of humility and the surrender to the authority of Lordship. We as believers tend to practice the opposite of course, and we give to God our leftovers and floor-sweepings. We generally give of our time and finances just up to the point of discomfort. After all, how can I live without Netflix or my gym membership? (Note story of early church “Marlboro Men.”)

**Malachi 1:13 - 14** *You say, 'It's too hard to serve the LORD,' and you turn up your noses at my commands,' says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "Think of it! Animals that are stolen and crippled and sick are being presented as offerings! Should I accept from you such offerings as these?" asks the LORD. "Cursed is the cheat who promises to give a fine ram from his flock but then sacrifices a defective one to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "and my name is feared among the nations!*

**Malachi 3:8 - 12** *"Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! "But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' "You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.*

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) *So why was the taking of the census offensive to God in this case?*
- 2) *In what ways do I “take stock” of the things I have or my accomplishments when I feel like God may not “deliver” on His promises? How do I hunker down to defend my position with my own weapons of defense?*
- 3) *What are those things that I draw my security and pride from apart from God?*
- 4) **It was through David’s own conscience that he realizes that he has sinned against God in taking the census. What is my role in coming to the acknowledgment of my sin... in coming to the truth about my sin, and what therefor should be my response to such be?** (I must remain humble and pliable to the Spirit of God. I must be self-reflective and introspective always, and ready to repent and restore if possible, of sins I enact. I must MOVE in response to such...move to seek forgiveness before God, *and before men*. And move to restore if possible. Move to make things right and to express justice as well as mercy.)
- 5) **David did not heed Joab on this issue. How reliable am I in this matter and how responsive am I to others** (brothers and sisters in my community) *prodding and correcting?*
- 6) **David insists on paying for the threshing floor and any burnt offering even though he could have easily gotten them for free. What does this show about true repentance, and about the proper attitude in coming before God in general? Is this found in YOUR life?**
- 7) **Are you sensitive to those times when you stand in need of God’s discipline? Are you quick to recognize what God is doing and respond? What evidence do you have to that?**
- 8) **Do we become complacent, prideful and self reliant in times of “peace” in your personal world? If so, what is the answer to fix such?** (Do you understand that God *will* get your attention, even if that means with some pain?)
- 9) **Do we appreciate the mercy of God and how He even transforms our sin into opportunities to develop our character and bring us greater spiritual blessing? What does that “appreciation” look like practically speaking?**
- 10) **Consider your “sacrifices” unto God: How do you determine in your own life what to give to God? What is the process and the thinking behind your decision?**