



FEED MY SHEEP

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Plague on the Nation due to Leader's Sin

Would God still do that today? Bring a severe plague or other punishment on our nation because of the sin(s) of our President, Congress, and Supreme Court? We are in the middle of a study of a sad incident in the life of King David—a sin which cost the nation dearly. Our theory is that David ordered a census of the people out of a motive of pride—to exalt himself in the size and power of his armies. We closed last issue by stating that there is a second aspect to his sin, which we will come to shortly. Let us pick up our text again in 1 Chronicles 21.

1 Chronicles 21:7 And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.

8 And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

I have read more than one commentator who asserts that David repented very soon after he had ordered the census, supposedly within days. Let Bible students be cautious with all Bible “helps” books. Simply because some so-called scholar has bound his comments on the Bible between the two covers of a book does not mean that it is worth the paper that it is printed upon. That assertion is a gross error. David could not *possibly* have repented until after Joab got back to Jerusalem after a period of nine months and 20 days for the simple reason that had David repented sooner, he certainly would have sent a message to Joab to cease and desist from taking the census.

Let us now return to compare 2 Samuel 24 again because there is an interesting parallel. One could say

that when David was in sin, he was at least consistent in his stubbornness. He did *not* immediately repent. In our study entitled *David and Bathsheba* [CDs/tapes #420 & 421], we learned that after David had committed the fornication with Bathsheba, that he did not confess his sin *until* he was confronted with it by Nathan the prophet. And that, we calculated, was close to nine months after the sin. So, twice in the Bible record we find that David remained stubborn and stiff-necked, refusing to admit his sin for just under nine months in one case, and for nine months and 20 days in this case. I have no light at this point on what significance there is to the nine months and 20 days. However, if we allow 30 days per month, then the total is 290 days. The only place in the Bible where I found the number 290 is as part of the number 1,290 in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 12:11 And from the time *that* the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, *there shall be* a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

Is that significant? I don't know. If any reader has an insight on that, please enlighten me. Back to...

2 Samuel 24:10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people.

Is that not an obvious indicator of when David repented? ...*after* he conducted the census...or as I believe, until Joab had *almost* finished, save for the tribe of Benjamin. Also, because immediately upon his confession now, God sends the seer to announce disciplinary judgment.

10b And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that [what] I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

11 For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

12 Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three *things*; choose thee one of them, that I may *do it* unto thee.

David has free will to choose here; or so it appears. Here are the choices:

13 So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.

Let us compare this to the Chronicles account:

1 Chronicles 21:9 And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying,

10 Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three *things*: choose thee one of them, that I may *do it* unto thee.

11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee

12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh *thee*; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.

Uh-oh! Another discrepancy, another Bible error, right? God just can't seem to keep His numbers straight, can He? The historian of 2 Samuel said that choice number one was *seven* years. Here the chronicler gives it as *three* years' famine. I will not take the time to present the way the two passages can be harmonized, but they can. The weight comes down on the side of the three three's. Three years, three months or three days. God considered the three choices to be equal chastisements. Okay, class, here is your essay question. Which would you choose, ...and why? Let's see what David chose.

2 Samuel 24:14 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies *are* great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.

15 So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.

Wow! Seventy thousand dead in three days! This pestilence is elsewhere called a plague. Now I want to show you why I said David's sin may have been two-fold. We have a plague upon Israel that just wiped out 70,000 in three days. Way back in Exodus, 400-plus years before David was born, sandwiched right in the middle of God's instructions to Moses on how to construct the tabernacle and its equipment, God gives some special instructions on census taking.

Exodus 30:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

12 When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when *thou* numberest them.

13 This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs:) an half shekel *shall be* the offering of the LORD.

14 Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD.

15 The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when *they* give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

16 And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

There is no record that David had any arrangements for the half-shekel to be collected. That, coupled with the fact that a plague killed 70,000 is significant evidence that, it was not collected. Therefore, we assign the sin of disobedience to David along with his pride and stubbornness. Let us read the parallel passage of David's choosing "door number three."

1 Chronicles 21:13 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great *are* his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

This is almost identical to the other passage, except that in 2 Samuel it tells us that the pestilence began from that very morning until the time appointed—that is, for three days. What does David give as his reason for choosing the three *day* punishment? It is because he would rather trust in God's great mercy than in the hand of men who are often very cruel. Three months of being chased by an enemy army would subject his army to various cruelties and no doubt, many deaths. Frankly, I think there were going to be 70,000 deaths no matter which one David chose. I will tell you why in a moment.

One might wonder about the three years of famine being in the hand of man. I mean, God sends the drought and famine, doesn't He? Yes, of course, but, if Israel had to depend upon alien nations for food, you can imagine all sorts of ways that Israel's enemies might use food as a very cruel weapon. Now, let us consider the losses. We all remember the horror of witnessing the deaths of about 3,000 people in the attacks on September 11, 2001. Three thousand people killed in one day.

I have mentioned previously the September 17, 1862 Battle of Antietam, a battle in Maryland, about 50 miles west of D. C., where the Union and Confederate forces lost a total of about 21,000 men in one day. What a slaughter! Less than a year later, on July 1st through the 3rd 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania raged for three days, and the carnage totaled about 53,000 men. Estimates vary widely on what the total population of Israel was at the time when David was prevented from knowing it. It could have been anywhere from a low of seven million, to a high end estimate of 30 million.

In either case, just imagine how much greater the impact of 70,000 is in such a small nation, compared to the United States. We hear about West Nile virus. We hear about Mad Cow disease. We hear about SARS and other plague-type diseases. None of these kill in 24 hours, nor have we begun to approach the tens of thousands that God directed his angel to slay among His chosen people in a single three-day period.

The SARS threat now appears to be mostly forgotten, but just imagine if it had gotten out of control, and we heard on the news that in just the past three days 70,000 people had died. You saw what only a couple of deaths from anthrax did. (Or was that mostly media hype for some ulterior reason?) Aside from the tragedy of the losses themselves, can you imagine the draconian measures that would be taken by the government in terms of our freedom of movement? That is something to think about, isn't it?

I found some notes that I had written in my "hard copy" Bible some years ago concerning this passage of Scripture of the 70,000 deaths. It says: "Israel owed a 70-year time-debt after having spent 434 years in Canaanland. David took a census but failed to collect the ½ shekel atonement money. So God judged the nation: 1,000 men for each of the 70 years of debt. The next 434 year cycle ends with the 70 year Babylonian Captivity. It is actually 385 years chronologically, but it is 434 years *legally* (that is, by God's reckoning) due to overlapping co-regencies."

Those notes are a summary of ideas which I gleaned from Stephen Jones' book *Secrets of Time*. Stephen taught that the 434 years is a number representing what he calls "Judged Time." Different periods of years in Bible chronology are known as Cursed Time, Judged Time and Blessed Time. It is absolutely astounding the way the numbers of years work out in history. If you have not read that book, we still carry it. [B-118, \$24 ppd.] I have often said it is one which ought to be mandatory reading for all students in seminaries and Bible colleges.

If his idea is correct about this being 1,000 men corresponding to each of the 70 years of accumulated debt owed to God, then as I said, there were going to be 70,000 men killed no matter which of the three choices David made. Therefore, do you think that David truly had *free* will in choosing which one of the three? No, because only this one was preordained to have it end at the threshing floor of Ornan which is critical to God's Plan.

1 Chronicles 21:15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: ...

... A destroying angel—does that not remind us of the destroying angel going throughout Egypt killing all the firstborn? Here, God's destroying angel had already gone from Dan in the far north to Beersheba in

the southern extremity of the nation, loosing death upon 70,000 people. God evidently saved Jerusalem, the capital, for last, and just as the angel was about to unleash death there, God held back the angel.

15b and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

David saw either literally or in vision this angel in the air over Jerusalem, hovering over the hilltop where Ornan the Jebusite had his threshing floor. He saw this angel with a drawn sword symbolizing the judgment about to fall upon Jerusalem, just as it already had fallen upon the rest of the nation.

Can you imagine how David must have felt during those first two days in his office in Jerusalem as runners came in from all over the nation with reports of thousands dying here and thousands dying due to some mysterious pestilence, all the while knowing that it was a judgment for his sin? What a burden of conscience he must have felt!

Now David sees the angel about to deliver death in the capital. David must have also been wondering how many of his own family would be struck down. David had already confessed the sin and so now he humbles himself with the elders. Back to

2 Samuel 24: 16 And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.

Araunah the Jebusite in 2 Samuel. Ornan the Jebusite in 1 Chronicles—not another Bible error. They are the same person, merely two different forms of the name. Let us take note that there is a particular place associated with the cessation of the plague, that place being the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

17 And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.

Ahead to 1 Chronicles to compare the parallel verse...

1 Chronicles 21:17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

Can you imagine King *Saul* humbling himself and taking full responsibility for his sin upon himself? He never did. Only once, when Samuel the prophet confronted him, did Saul ever mouth some words of pseudo-repentance. Because he went on to whine about how *he* really wasn't to blame because "the people made me do it, and besides the *Philistines* were coming and you, Samuel, you didn't show up on time, and the people were getting really antsy and...and... well, well, it's just not all my fault. I'm not to blame for this...boo hoo hoo."

What a difference between the character of King Saul and King David. *Both* were guilty of pride and stubbornness and disobedience. But Saul never truly repented. In contrast, David here exhibits true heartfelt sorrow, remorse and repentance and further, he takes *all* the blame upon himself. This is another reason why God declared that David was a man after God's own heart. David—when he repented—sought God with all his heart. We will pick up with this theme next month.

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