

David Numbers Israel**Lesson Scope:** [1 Chronicles 21](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

The life of David teaches us many lessons. We learn how to live nobly under persecution and how to take responsibility humbly. We learn how to have victory by God's help. We learn fervency and devotion in worship.

In this lesson, David illustrates the truth of Proverbs 24:16: "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." In a world of sin and temptation, failures occur. This lesson shows a just man's response to his failure and God's abundant provision for mercy. The lesson climax shows the full return of God's favour upon David. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Romans 4:8).

This question may come: Why does 1 Chronicles attribute this sin to a temptation from Satan while 2 Samuel declares that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and that the Lord moved David to number Israel? Do not dwell on this question or allow this to displace the great truths of this lesson.

An answer might be this: If David, Israel, or both were not walking close to the Lord or if David had pride in his heart, God needed to allow David to be tempted so the true state of his heart would be exposed. Only as we stay close to the Lord and His will can we expect His protecting hedge to be ours. God does not tempt man, but He does test man.

A man of God is not immune to failure. If he sins, his character is revealed by his attitude toward his sin.

Lesson Aim: To see what constitutes a right attitude when one is ensnared by sin.

Theme Verse: [Psalm 51:1](#). Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Lesson Text

Temptation and Sin

1 Chronicles 21:1-7

¹ (KJV) And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. ² And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know *it*. ³ And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they *be*: but, my lord the king, *are* they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? ⁴ Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. ⁵ And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all *they of* Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah *was* four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. ⁶ But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab. ⁷ And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.

Judgment With Mercy

1 Chronicles 21:8

⁸ (KJV) 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.

1 Chronicles 21:11-16

¹¹ (KJV) 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. 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. ¹⁵ And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: 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 threshing floor 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.

Repentance and Pardon

1 Chronicles 21:17-18

¹⁷ (KJV) 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. ¹⁸ Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

1 Chronicles 21:22

²² (KJV) Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of *this* threshing floor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.

1 Chronicles 21:26-27

²⁶ (KJV) And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. ²⁷ And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

Questions for Study

Temptation and Sin

1. How was the temptation to number Israel appealing to the carnal nature?
2. Israel was numbered before. Why was David's act a sin?
3. What keeps us from listening to those who warn us of a wrong course?

Judgment With Mercy

4. What events in this lesson portray God's wrath?
5. Describe genuine repentance. How did David display this?
6. What evidences of mercy toward sinners does God continually show?

Repentance and Pardon

7. What were the far-reaching effects of David's sin?
8. What conditions did David need to meet for his restoration?
9. What acts showed God's pardon for David's sin?

Analysing the Passage

The parallel passage to this lesson is 2 Samuel 24. Joab's words in 21:3 show that he perceived David's motive to be wrong. In 2 Samuel 24:3 Joab asks, "Why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?"

Exodus 30:11-16 prescribes the procedure to be followed for numbering the people. Every person numbered was to give half a shekel of silver as redemption money so that no plague would break out among the people. This numbering was never finished (21:16) or officially recorded (27:24). As a result, the numbers in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 do not agree.

In 21:16, the angel is standing "between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem"—a picture of wrath and imminent judgment.

In 21:27, the sword is "put up . . . again into the sheath"—a picture of the triumph of mercy over judgment and a picture of acceptance and pardon to the repentant sinner.

Principles and Applications

Temptation and Sin

1. All sin originates with Satan (21:1). "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15). Satan appeals to us through the senses of the body and through our ego in the thoughts of the mind. Temptation is not sin until lust "hath conceived." Conception is a uniting action when our will gives consent to the appeal of temptation. Then what was first an external appeal becomes the desire of our heart.

2. Temptation strikes a sympathetic cord with the fallen human nature (21:2). Realizing our tendency to sin and our human weakness in resisting sin should cause us to "watch and pray."

3. God sends others to warn us of a wrong course (21:3). God uses men, even those whom we might consider below us, to give us warning and good advice. Pride and self-will has silenced much good counsel and mined many souls.

4. Sin brings judgment (21:5-7). Do we believe this? Satan would tempt us to think that we can get away with sin. David was king. David was a man after God's own heart, but his sin brought judgment. Do we believe the law of sowing and reaping? Why might we attempt to excuse young people? Do we think they will get by?

Judgment With Mercy

5. Accepting personal responsibility for sin exemplifies repentance (21:8). Four times in verse 8 David uses the pronoun I. David assumed full responsibility for the scope and nature of his sin. He declares that he sinned "greatly" and "very foolishly." David described his wrong as sin (missing the mark) and as iniquity (perversion).

6. The repentant are willing to accept the consequences of sin (21:11-14, 16). The unrepentant often blame God for the results of sin. Repentance is a turning around. When we repent, we renounce our former rebellion against God. We agree that His holy law is perfectly righteous. We confess that we have broken His holy law. We accept that God's verdict of condemnation upon us for our sin is just.

7. The repentant sinner understands that the mercy of God is his only hope (21:13). The mercy of God withholds the immediate execution and vengeance to give us opportunity to repent. The mercy of God calls us to repentance and provides the remedy for our sin. In His mercy, God deals with us according to our human frailty.

8. Outward evidence accompanies true repentance (21:16). The essential elements of repentance are conviction, contrition, confession, restitution, forsaking of sin, and a change of heart. Modern Christianity talks much of forgiveness and little of fruit-bearing repentance. John the Baptist warned his audience to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance and gave specific examples of actions that showed repentance. In no uncertain tones, he called those who seek forgiveness without repentance a "generation of vipers" (see Luke 3: 1-18).

Repentance and Pardon

9. True repentance acknowledges the harm our sin has brought to others (21:17). David, as a leader, recognized that his failure caused many in-

nocent persons to suffer. The choices of leaders and parents affect many who are following them. One needs only to look at a family history to see how the failure of one ancestor affected his posterity. May we, by God's grace, determine to make right choices and leave a good example for others.

10. To the repentant, God sends a messenger with the provisions for pardon (21:18). God used an angel and a prophet to mediate His way of mercy to David. This was the Old Testament pattern (see Hebrews 1: 1 and Galatians 3:19). In the New Testament, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The church ministers the Word of God to the repentant to help them find forgiveness and restoration.

11. A sacrifice is necessary to atone for sin (21:18, 22, 26-27). While repentance is essential for forgiveness, all the tears, restitution, and apologies will not merit forgiveness with God. These will repair the damage done to men, but only the blood of Christ can wash away our sins before God.

12. The wrath of God is fully turned away from the forgiven sinner (21:27). Jesus "bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). His blood was shed, and our debt to God was paid. God answered David by fire from heaven, signifying the restoration of His presence among Israel.

Important Teachings

1. All sin originates with Satan (21:1).
2. Temptation strikes a sympathetic cord with the fallen human nature (21:2).
3. God sends others to warn us of a wrong course (21:3).
4. Sin brings judgment (21:5-7).
5. Accepting personal responsibility for sin exemplifies repentance (21:8).
6. The repentant are willing to accept the consequences of sin (21:11-14, 16).
7. The repentant sinner understands that the mercy of God is his only hope (21:13).
8. Outward evidence accompanies true repentance (21:16).
9. True repentance acknowledges the harm our sin has brought to others (21:17).

10. To the repentant, God sends a messenger with the provisions for pardon (21:18).

11. A sacrifice is necessary to atone for sin (21:18, 22, 26-27).

12. The wrath of God is fully turned away from the forgiven sinner (21:27).

Answers to Questions

1. How was the temptation to number Israel appealing to the carnal nature?

The numbering of the people appealed to David's ego, flattering himself with the size, power, and growth of his kingdom. Besides this appeal to pride, this information would have made David feel less dependent on God, more self-sufficient, and more able to face the enemy on his own.

2. Israel was numbered before. Why was David's act a sin?

This numbering was not commanded by God. Compare to Numbers 1:1-2 and Numbers 26:1-2. The offering required in Exodus 30:11-16 was not given.

3. What keeps us from listening to those who warn us of a wrong course?

Pride and self-will have silenced much good counsel and ruined many souls. We feel that we must show those below us that we have no accountability to them. We feel self-confident and able to handle dangerous situations.

4. What events in this lesson portray God's wrath?

Seventy thousand Israelite men died. The angel of the Lord held a drawn sword ready to destroy Jerusalem.

5. Describe genuine repentance. How did David display this?

Repentance includes conviction, contrition, confession, restitution, forsaking of sin, and a change of heart. David displayed genuine repentance by accepting personal responsibility for his sin. He accepted the consequences of sin and realized that God's mercy was his only hope. He attempted no self-justification. He acknowledged the harm his sin had inflicted on others. He was clothed in sackcloth and fell upon his face before God.

6. What evidences of mercy toward sinners does God continually show?

God sends sunshine and rain on the just and the unjust. God does not deal with us according to our sins or reward us with the full penalty for

our sins. God withholds the penalty of death to give us opportunities to repent. God remembers the frailty of our human life.

7. What were the far-reaching effects of David's sin?

Many innocent people died and their loved ones suffered.

8. What conditions were given to David for his restoration?

David needed to build an altar and offer appropriate sacrifices. David needed to call on God for redemption. This emphasized that sin can only be expiated by a blood sacrifice.

9. What acts showed God's pardon for David's sin?

Fire came from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering. The angel put his sword into his sheath.

Summarizing the Lesson

Sin paints a dark picture with dire consequences. But God's provision was made before He created man. The greatness of God's mercy and pardon far exceeds our sin and our guilt. Our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west and are remembered no more

Research Guide

1. Read Exodus 30:11-16 for instructions for numbering the people.
2. Read "Repentance" in *Doctrines of the Bible* pages 270-277.