

CHAPTER 21

As this rehearsal makes no mention of David's sin in the matter of Uriah, so neither of the troubles of his family that followed upon it; not a word of Absalom's rebellion, or Sheba's. But David's sin, in numbering the people, is here related, because, in the atonement made for that sin, an intimation was given of the spot of ground on which the temple should be built. Here is,

- I.** David's sin, in forcing Joab to number the people (v. 1-6).
- II.** David's sorrow for what he had done, as soon as he perceived the sinfulness of it (v. 7, 8).
- III.** The sad dilemma (or trilemma rather) he was brought to, when it was put to him to choose how he would be punished for this sin, and what rod he would be beaten with (v. 9-13).
- IV.** The woeful havoc which was made by the pestilence in the country, and the narrow escape which Jerusalem had from being laid waste by it (v. 14-17).
- V.** David's repentance, and sacrifice, upon this occasion, and the staying of the plague thereupon (v. 18-30). This awful story we met with, and meditated upon, 2 Samuel 24.

<1200>1 CHRONICLES 21:1-6

THE GIANTS SUBDUED

Numbering the people, one would think, was no bad thing. Why should not the shepherd know the number of his flock? But God sees not as man sees. It is plain it was wrong in David to do it, and a great provocation to God, because he did it in the pride of his heart; and there is no sin that has in it more of contradiction and therefore more of offence to God than pride. The sin was David's; he alone must bear the blame of it. But here we are told,

- I.** How active the tempter was in it (v. 1): *Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David* to do it. Is is said (<1200>2 Samuel 24:1) that *the anger*

of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David to do it. The righteous judgments of God are to be observed and acknowledged even in the sins and unrighteousness of men. We are sure that God is not the author of sin — he *tempts no man*; and therefore, when it is said that he moved David to do it, it must be explained by what is intimated here, that, for wise and holy ends, he permitted the devil to do it. Here we trace this foul stream to its foundation. That Satan, the enemy of God and all good, should *stand up against Israel*, is not strange; it is what he aims at, to weaken the strength, diminish the numbers, and eclipse the glory of God's Israel, to whom he is *Satan*, a sworn *adversary*. But that he should influence David, the man of God's own heart to do a wrong thing, may well be wondered at. One would think him one of those whom the wicked one touches not. No, even the best saints, till they come to heaven, must never think themselves out of the reach of Satan's temptations. Now, when Satan meant to do Israel a mischief, what course did he take? He did not *move God against them to destroy them* (as ^{<KJB>}Job 2:3), but he provoked David, the best friend they had, to number them, and so to offend God, and set him against them. Note,

1. The devil does us more mischief by tempting us to sin against our God than he does by accusing us before our God. He destroys none but by their own hands,
2. The greatest spite he can do to the church of God is to tempt the rulers of the church to pride; for none can conceive the fatal consequences of that sin in all, especially in church-rulers. *You shall not be so*, ^{<226>}Luke 22:26.

II. How passive the instrument was. Joab, the person whom David employed, was an active man in public business; but to this he was perfectly forced, and did it with the greatest reluctance imaginable.

1. He put in a remonstrance against it before he began it. No man more forward that he in any thing that really tended to the honour of the king or the welfare of the kingdom; but in this matter he would gladly be excused. For,

(1.) It was a needless thing. there was not occasion at all for it. God had promised to multiply them, and he needed not question the accomplishment of that promise. They were all his servants, and he needed not doubt of their loyalty and affection to him. Their number was as much his strength as he could desire.

(2.) It was a dangerous thing. In doing it he might be a cause of trespass to Israel, and might provoke God against them. This Joab apprehended, and yet David himself did not. The most learned in the laws of God are not always the most quick-sighted in the application of those laws.

2. He was quite weary of it before he had done it; for *the king's word was abominable to Joab*, v. 6. Time was when whatever king David did *pleased all the people*, ^{<1036>}2 Samuel 3:36. But now there was a general disgust at these orders, which confirmed Joab in his dislike of them. so that, though the produce of this muster was really very great, yet he had no heart to perfect it, but left two tribes unnumbered (v. 5, 6), two considerable ones, Levi and Benjamin, and perhaps was not very exact in numbering the rest, because he did not do it with any pleasure, which might be one occasion of the difference between the sums here and ^{<1019>}2 Samuel 24:9.

<12107> 1 CHRONICLES 21:7-17

DAVID'S NUMBERING THE PEOPLE

David is here under the rod for numbering the people, that rod of correction which drives out the foolishness that is bound up in the heart, the foolishness of pride. Let us briefly observe,

I. How he was corrected. If God's dearest children do amiss, they must expect to smart for it.

1. He is given to understand that God is displeased; and that it is no small uneasiness to so good a man as David, v. 7. God takes notice of, and is displeased with, the sins of his people; and no sin is more displeasing to him than pride of heart: nor is anything more humbling, and grieving, and mortifying to a gracious soul, than to see itself under God's displeasure.

2. He is put to his choice whether he will be punished by war, famine, or pestilence; for punished he must be, and by one of these. Thus, for his further humiliation, he is put into a strait, a great strait, and has the terror of all the three judgments impressed upon his mind, no doubt to his great amazement, while he is considering which he shall choose.

3. He hears of 70,000 of his subjects who in a few hours were struck dead by the pestilence, v. 14. He was proud of the multitude of his people, but divine Justice took a course to make them fewer. Justly is that taken from us, weakened, or embittered to us, which we are proud of. David must have the people numbered: *Bring me the number of them*, says he, *that I may know it*. But now God numbers them after another manner, *numbers to the sword*, ^{236D}Isaiah 65:12. And David had another number of them brought, more to his confusion than was to his satisfaction, namely, the number of the slain — a black bill of mortality, which is a drawback to his muster-roll.

4. He sees the destroying angel, with his sword drawn against Jerusalem, v. 16. This could not but be very terrible to him, as it was a visible indication of the anger of Heaven, and threatened the utter destruction of that beloved city. Pestilences make the greatest devastations in the most populous places. The sight of an angel, though coming peaceably and on a friendly errand, has made even mighty men to tremble; how dreadful then must this sight be of an angel with a drawn sword in his hand, a flaming sword, like that of the cherubim, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life! While we lie under the wrath of God the holy angels are armed against us, though we see them not as David did.

II. How he bore the correction.

1. He made a very penitent confession of his sin, and prayed earnestly for the pardon of it, v. 8. Now he owned that he had sinned, had sinned greatly, had done foolishly, very foolishly; and he entreated that, however he might be corrected for it, the iniquity of it might be done away.

2. He accepted the punishment of his iniquity: “Let thy hand be *on me, and on my father's house*, v. 17. I submit to the rod, only let me be the sufferer, for I am the sinner; mine is the guilty head at which the sword should be pointed.”

3. He cast himself upon the mercy of God (though he knew he was angry with him) and did not entertain any hard thoughts of him. However it be, *Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great*, v. 13. Good men, even when God frowns upon them, think well of him. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*.

4. He expressed a very tender concern for the people, and it went to his heart to see them plagued for his transgression: *These sheep, what have they done?*

1 CHRONICLES 21:18-30

ORNAN'S THRESHING-FLOOR

We have here the controversy concluded, and, upon David's repentance, his peace made with God. *Though thou wast angry with me, thy anger is turned away.*

1. A stop was put to the progress of the execution, v. 15. When David repented of the sin God repented of the judgment, and ordered the destroying angel to *stay his hand* and *sheath his sword*, v. 27.
2. Direction was given to David to rear an altar in the threshing-floor of Ornan, v. 18. The angel commanded the prophet Gad to bring David this direction. The same angel that had, in God's name, carried on the war, is here forward to set on foot the treaty of peace; for angels do not desire the woeful day. The angel could have given this order to David himself; but he chose to do it by his seer, that he might put an honour upon the prophetic office. Thus the revelation of Jesus Christ was notified by the angel to John, and by him to the churches. The commanding of David to build an altar was a blessed token of reconciliation; for, if God had been pleased to kill him, he would not have appointed, because he would not have accepted, a sacrifice at his hands.
3. David immediately made a bargain with Ornan for the threshing-floor; for he would not serve God at other people's charge. Ornan generously offered it to him gratis, not only in complaisance to the king, but because he had himself *seen the angel* (v. 20), which so terrified him that he and his four sons hid themselves, as unable to bear the brightness of his glory and afraid of his drawn sword. Under these apprehensions he was willing to do anything towards making the atonement. Those that are duly sensible of the terrors of the Lord will do all they can, in their places, to promote religion, and encourage all the methods of reconciliation for the turning away of God's wrath.

4. God testified his acceptance of David's offerings on this altar; He *answered him from heaven by fire*, v. 26. To signify that God's anger was turned away from him, the fire that might justly have fastened upon the sinner fastened upon the sacrifice and consumed that; and, upon this, the destroying sword was returned into its sheath. Thus Christ was made sin and a curse for us, and it pleased the Lord to bruise him, that through him God might be to us, not a consuming fire, but a reconciled Father.

5. He continued to offer his sacrifices upon this altar. The brazen altar which Moses made was at Gibeon (v. 29), and there all the sacrifices of Israel were offered; but David was so terrified at the sight of the sword of the angel that he *could not go thither*, v. 30. The business required haste, when the plague was begun. Aaron must go quickly, nay, he must *run*, to make atonement, ~~Chap.~~ Numbers 16:46, 47. And the case here was no less urgent; so that David had not time to go to Gibeon: nor durst he leave the angel with his sword drawn over Jerusalem, lest the fatal stroke should be given before he came back. And therefore God, in tenderness to him, bade him build an altar in that place, dispensing with his own law concerning one altar because of the present distress, and accepting the sacrifices offered on this new altar, which was not set up in opposition to that, but in concurrence with it. The symbols of unity were not so much insisted on as unity itself. Nay, when the present distress was over (as it should seem), David, as long as he lived, sacrificed there, though the altar at Gibeon was still kept up; for God had owned the sacrifices that were here offered and had testified his acceptance of them, v. 28. On those administrations in which we have experienced the tokens of God's presence, and have found that he is with us of a truth, it is good to continue our attendance. "Here God had graciously met me, and therefore I will still expect to meet with him."