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Introduction

David is tempted by Satan to number Israel and Judah, 2 Samuel 24:1. Joab remonstrates against it, but the king determines that it shall be done; and Joab and the captains accomplish the work, and bring the sum total to the king: viz.: eight hundred thousand warriors in Israel, and five hundred thousand in Judah, 2 Samuel 24:2-9. David is convinced that he has done wrong; and the prophet Gad is sent to him, to give him his choice of three judgments, one of which God is determined to inflict upon the nation, 2 Samuel 24:10-13. David humbles himself before God; and a pestilence is sent, which destroys seventy thousand men, 2 Samuel 24:14, 2 Samuel 24:15. The angel of the Lord being about to destroy Jerusalem, David makes intercession, and the plague is stayed, 2 Samuel 24:16, 2 Samuel 24:17. Gad directs him to build an altar to the Lord on the threshing-floor of Araunah, where the plague was stayed, 2 Samuel 24:18. He purchases this place for the purpose, and offers burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, 2 Samuel 24:19-25.

Verse 1

He moved David against them - God could not be angry with David for numbering the people if he moved him to do it; but in the parallel place (1 Chronicles 21:1) it is expressly said, Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. David, in all probability, slackening in his piety and confidence toward God, and meditating some extension of his dominions without the Divine counsel or command, was naturally curious to know whether the number of fighting men in his empire was sufficient for the work which he had projected. See more on 2 Samuel 24:10 (note). He therefore orders Joab and the captains to take an exact account of all the effective men in Israel and Judah. God is justly displeased with this conduct, and determines that the props of his vain ambition shall be taken away, either by famine, war, or pestilence.

Verse 3

Joab said unto the king - This very bad man saw that the measure now recommended by the king was a wrong one, and might be ruinous to the people, and therefore he remonstrates against it in a very sensible speech; but the king was infatuated, and would hear no reason.

Verse 5

And pitched in Aroer - This was beyond Jordan, on the river Arnon, in the tribe of Gad: hence it appears, says Calmet, that they began their census with the most eastern parts of the country beyond Jordan.

Verse 6

Tahtim-hodshi - Where this place was is not exactly known: some think that the words refer to a newly conquered country, as our margin, the nether land newly inhabited; and if so, this was probably the country eastward of Gilead, which the Israelites, in the time of Saul, had conquered from the Hagarites, and dwelt in themselves. See 1 Chronicles 5:10, where this transaction is recorded.

To Dan-jaan - Or, to Dan of the woods. This is the place so frequently mentioned, situated at the foot of Mount Libanus, near to the source of the Jordan, the most northern city of all the possessions of the Israelites in what was called the promised land, as Beer-sheba was the most southern: hence the common form of speech, From Dan to Beer-sheba, i.e., from north to south.

Verse 7

The strong hold of Tyre - This must have been the old city of Tyre, which was built on the main land: the new city was built on a rock in the sea.

Verse 8

Nine months and twenty days - This was a considerable time; but they had much work to do, nor did they complete the work, as appears from 1 Chronicles 21:6; 1 Chronicles 27:24. William the Conqueror made a survey of all England, particularizing how many hides or carucates the land is taxed at; whose it was in the time of his predecessor Edward; who the present owners and sub-tenants; what and how much arable land, meadow, pasture, and wood there is, how much in demesne, i.e., held and cultivated by the landowners; how much in tenantry, and what number of ploughs it will keep; what mills and fisheries; how many sockmen, freemen, co-liberti, cotarii, bordarii, radmanni, radchenisters, villains, maid-servants, and bondmen, there are; how many hogs the woods would support; how many churches, priests, or parsons; what customary rents, prestations, and services, are to be paid and rendered out of the lands; what has been added to the manor; what has been withheld from it, and by whom; what land is waste, and what the whole was let for in the time of King Edward; and what the nett rent, and whether it was too dear rented, and whether it might be improved.

This survey was begun in the year 1080, and was finished in the year 1086, six years having been employed in the work. This most important document is still preserved; it is in the Chapter House, Westminster, in two volumes, one in folio, on three hundred and eighty-two leaves of vellum. the other in quarto, on four hundred and fifty leaves; and is in as good preservation as it was seven hundred years ago. This work was much more difficult than that which was performed by Joab and his fellows. The work itself is known by the name Domesday Book.

#### Verse 9

In Israel eight hundred thousand - the men of Judah were five hundred thousand - In the parallel place, 1 Chronicles 21:5, the sums are widely different: in Israel one million one hundred thousand, in Judah four hundred and seventy thousand. Neither of these sums is too great, but they cannot be both correct; and which is the true number is difficult to say. The former seems the most likely; but more corruptions have taken place in the numbers of the historical books of the Old Testament, than in any other part of the sacred records. To attempt to reconcile them in every part is lost labor; better at once acknowledge what cannot be successfully denied, that although the original writers of the Old Testament wrote under the influence of the Divine Spirit, yet we are not told that the same influence descended on all copiers of their words, so as absolutely to prevent them from making mistakes. They might mistake, and they did mistake; but a careful collation of the different historical books serves to correct all essential errors of the scribes. See the Dissertations of Dr. Kennicott mentioned at the conclusion of the preceding chapter.

#### Verse 10

David said - I have sinned greatly - We know not exactly in what this sin consisted. I have already hinted, 2 Samuel 24:1, that probably David now began to covet an extension of empire, and purposed to unite some of the neighboring states with his own; and having, through the suggestions of Satan or some other adversary, (for so the word implies), given way to this covetous disposition, he could not well look to God for help, and therefore wished to know whether the thousands of Israel and Judah might be deemed equal to the conquests which he meditated. When God is offended and refuses assistance, vain is the help of man.

#### Verse 11

For when David was up - It is supposed that David's contrition arose from the reproof given by Gad, and that in the order of time the reproof came before the confession stated in the 10th verse.

David's seer - A holy man of God, under the Divine influence, whom David had as a domestic chaplain.

#### Verse 13

Shall seven years of famine - In 1 Chronicles 21:12, the number is three, not seven; and here the Septuagint has three, the same as in Chronicles: this is no doubt the true reading, the letter x- (zain), Seven, being mistaken for x' (gimel), Three. A mistake of this kind might be easily made from the similarity of the letters.

#### Verse 14

I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord - David acted nobly in this business. Had he chosen war, his own personal safety was in no danger, because there was already an ordinance preventing him from going to battle. Had he chosen famine, his own wealth would have secured his and his own family's support. But he showed the greatness of his mind in choosing the pestilence, to the ravages of which himself and household were exposed equally with the meanest of his subjects.

#### Verse 15

From the morning - to the time appointed - That is, from the morning of the day after David had made his election till the third day, according to the condition which God had proposed, and he had accepted: but it seems that the plague was terminated before the conclusion of the third day, for Jerusalem might have been destroyed, but it was not. Throughout the land, independently of the city, seventy thousand persons were slain! This was a terrible mortality in the space of less than three days.

#### Verse 16

The angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem - By what means this destruction took place, we know not: it appears that an angel was employed in it, and that this minister of Divine justice actually appeared as an object of sight; for it is said, 2 Samuel 24:17, When David saw the angel that smote the people, he said, etc.; and both Ornan and his four sons saw him and were affrighted, 1 Chronicles 21:20.

The threshing-place of Araunah - These threshing-places, we have already seen, were made in the open air. In the parallel place, 1 Chronicles 21:15, 1 Chronicles 21:20, etc., this person is called Ornan. The word that we

render Araunah is written in this very chapter אֲרָנָה (Araunah), 2 Samuel 24:16, אֲרָנִיָּה (Araunah), 2 Samuel 24:18, אֲרָנָה (Araunah) or (Araunah), 2 Samuel 24:20, and the following: but in every place in 1 Chronicles 21:1-30 where it occurs it is written אֲרָנָה (Ornan). It is likely he had both names, Araunah and Ornan: but the varieties of spelling in 2 Samuel must arise from the blunders of transcribers.

#### Verse 17

But these sheep, what have they done? - It seems that in the order of Providence there is no way of punishing kings in their regal capacity, but by afflictions on their land, in which the people must necessarily suffer. If the king, therefore, by his own personal offenses, in which the people can have no part, bring down God's judgments upon his people, (though they suffer innocently), grievous will be the account that he must give to God. The people generally suffer for the miscarriages of their governors: this has been observed in every age.

Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.

- When doting monarchs urge

Unsound resolves, their subjects feel the scourge.

Hor. Ep. lib. i., ep. 2, ver. 14.

Against my father's house - That is, against his own family; even to cut it off from the face of the earth.

#### Verse 18

Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord - This place is supposed to be Mount Moriah: on which, according to the rabbins, Cain and Abel offered their sacrifices; where Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac, and where the temple of Solomon was afterwards built.

#### Verse 22

Here be oxen for burnt-sacrifice - He felt for the king; and showed his loyalty to him by this offer. He felt for the people; and was willing to make any sacrifice to get the plague stayed. He felt for his own personal safety; and therefore was willing to give up all to save his life. He felt for the honor of God; and therefore was glad that he had a sacrifice to offer, so that God might magnify both his justice and mercy.

#### Verse 23

As a king, give unto the king - Literally, All these did King Araunah give unto the king. That there could not be a king of the Jebusites on Mount Moriah, is sufficiently evident; and that there was no other king than David in the land, is equally so: the word חָמֵלֶךְ (hammelech), the king, given here to Araunah, is wanting in the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic; in three of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., and in the parallel place in Chronicles: and, it is very probable, never made a part of the text. Perhaps it should be read, All these did Arnunah give unto the king.

There is, however, a difficulty here. David had taken the fortress of the Jebusites many years before; yet it is evident that Araunah was proprietor of the soil at this time. It is not clear that he was a subject of David; but he paid him respect as a neighbor and a king. This is merely possible.

#### Verse 24

Neither will I offer burnt-offerings - It is a maxim from heaven, Honour the Lord with thy substance. He who has a religion that costs him nothing, has a religion that is worth nothing: nor will any man esteem the ordinances of God, if those ordinances cost him nothing. Had Araunah's noble offer been accepted, it would have been Araunah's sacrifice, not David's; nor would it have answered the end of turning away the displeasure of the Most High. It was David that sinned, not Araunah: therefore David must offer sacrifice, and at his own expense too.

#### Verse 25

David - offered burnt-offerings - And that these sacrifices were pleasing to the Lord, is evident from a circumstance marked in the parallel place, 1 Chronicles 21:26: David called upon the Lord, and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering.

The plague was stalled - Jerusalem did not share in the common calamity, seventy thousand being the whole that were slain throughout the land.

This book is unfinished, and requires 1 Chronicles 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29, to complete it. A few things relative to this history may be found in the beginning of the following book; but the information in 1 Chronicles is much more extensive and satisfactory.