



Playing the numbers game

Introduction

When King David committed adultery and murder he committed a very serious sin that had long ranging consequences for his whole family and the nation of Israel as a whole but when he repented and acknowledged his sin God graciously forgave him and restored him into His favour once more. However, David committed another sin that had far more reaching consequences for him and for the whole nation of Israel. David began to play the numbers game.

Today in many churches God's leaders are playing the same game that David played. They are counting heads but do not realize that they are heading for a disaster somewhere down the track. Today it seems that the success of a church depends on how many church members it has and this kind of thinking leads to spiritual pride.

Many churches have membership drives and in many cases church growth is not through evangelism but through carefully orchestrated entertainment programs called 'worship' that draws people in mainly from other churches who in reality want to have their ears tickled or to be able to say that they belong to a successful church.

Many of these churches actually started out right and God blessed them and added numbers to their ranks but over a period of time they have become proud of their success and it has gone to their

heads. King David had served the Lord for many years and God had given him victory again and again but he had become self confident and proud of the size of his army and the kingdom. Consequently he decided to number the troops.

Numbering heads is a very serious sin in God's sight because the Antichrist will do this during the great tribulation to gain political, religious, economical and social control over the whole world.

Now God has never been into the numbers game. When He asked Gideon to face the Midianites Gideon had at least 32,000 men at his command but when he finally went up against the Midianites he had only 300 men. God pruned down the numbers so that Gideon and the Israelites would not take the credit for the victory and fall into spiritual pride. In the end it was only the faithful remnant that overcame the enemy. (*Judges 7:4-8*)

Now David allowed the luxury of allowing his success to go to his head and brought disastrous consequences for God's people. Now lets look at the second sin of David and discover how it applies to many Church leaders and congregations today.

(Vs 1) "Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He incited David against them, saying, "Go and count Israel and Judah."

In this account in Second Samuel we are told that the Lord Himself incited David to count the troops but in the parallel account of this same event in 1Kings 21 we are told that *“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”* It seems that there is a contradiction in these accounts but when examined carefully there is no contradiction in the texts. Whenever the same account appears more than once in the scriptures the Holy Spirit really wants to tell us something important that we must not ignore. How then could one account say the Lord incited David but in the other account Satan incited David? Verse two of this chapter gives us further light.

(Vs 2) So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, “Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll (count, take a census of) the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are?”

Now the Lord had not told David to do this. With Gideon it was okay because God had a definite purpose in mind when He told Gideon to do this but in David’s case it was because of the pride in his heart and his hidden desire to count heads. Pride is the sin that leads to all other sins and it is the sin that Satan committed which got him kicked out of heaven. Now David was a king and was using his authority to go beyond what God had bestowed upon him to do. Today many leaders of big and successful churches are doing the same thing. Some even boast of their success in church growth. How then do we reconcile these two apparent contradictions? Did God or Satan incite David? The answer is that both of them did! Lets look at verses three and four.

(Vs 3-4) But Jab replied to the king, “May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my Lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king

want to do such a thing?” The kings word, however, overruled Jab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel.”

Joab had been with David for a long time and knew intuitively that what David was proposing was an act of pride. Even Joab knew that it was the Lord who brought men to David. When we read 1 Chronicles chapters 11-12 we see the Lord doing this. Many churches today forget this principle that the Lord must add people to the Church. We can get people in today with slick program, modern music and with other secular means of adding numbers to the church but unless the Lord adds them it is in vain.

Many big churches today are only big because they have sucked people in from other churches and church growth is primarily by transfer of membership and not by souls won through evangelism. The scripture says, *“Unless the Lord builds the house they labour in vain who seek to build it.”* Many church leaders today especially is multitudes of big Charismatic churches the leaders are doing exactly what David did. They rule by their own authority and the people love it this way but what will they do in the end?

Now notice the text says that *“the king’s word, however, overruled Joab.”* David intuitively knew that this was wrong but couldn’t resist the temptation to do this thing as it pandered to his ego as a king. In some ways it was the same kind of pride that led him to commit murder and adultery and then to cover it up and go on as if nothing had happened but of course he didn’t get away with it. How then did both Satan and God incite David?

Firstly Satan is the father and author and instigator of pride and is always looking for someone who is proud.

When David gave in to pride he put himself in a position where Satan could make a move on him and steer him in the wrong direction and so because of David's attitude Satan was able to incite him to count heads.

On the other hand the Lord saw David's determination and said, "okay if that's what you want to do go ahead and do it." The Lord permitted Satan to do this. However, Satan still needed God's permission to incite David, as Satan needed God's permission to afflict Job. So in that sense God incited David.

Obedience is very important because when we disobey the Lord and His Word we not only bring disastrous consequences on ourselves but on others as well. We see this in the life of king Saul. Now God does not incite people to sin but will at certain times, even with His children, permit them to fall in order to teach them a lesson because of the stubbornness of their hearts. There is not one of His saints that has not at one time or another learnt a lesson in this way.

We see a clear incident of this in the life of Ahab. He had decided in his heart to ignore God's Word and the Lord actually sent a lying spirit into the mouths of the false prophets to deceive Ahab. He chose to listen to the false prophets instead of the true ones and went to his own destruction. Ahab certainly was not a true believer. When he died it was at sunset. Sunrise speaks of the resurrection but sunset of death and the coming darkness. When we see this in Ahab's case God is telling us that Ahab was not a saved man when he died.

(Vs 5-10) In these verses we are told that David had all of the fighting men in his entire kingdom counted. This was a 'Hugh membership drive' that took nine months and twenty days. This beats all church records wouldn't you think so?

However, as we will see it resulted in terrible consequences for David's Kingdom.

(Vs 10) "David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

Now David was a godly man who really loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him with all of his heart. He didn't try to hide his sin as he had done in his affair with Bathsheba. He had learned by hard experience that it always pays to come clean with the Lord where sin is concerned. David was humble enough to recognize that what he had done really displeased the Lord. He recognized that he had sinned and had done a very foolish thing.

The tragedy today in many 'Super Churches' is that the leaders (Super apostles) do not have David's attitude and when anyone tries to correct them they make accusations about spiritual rebellion. The catch phrase among many of them today is "Touch not my anointed and do my prophets no harm." They say this to cover their sin of pride and covetousness and in many cases simply because they love money, prestige and power more than they love God. If God dealt severely with David even though he repented what do you think the Lord will do with these leaders? Well let's find out what the Lord did in David's case.

(Vs 11-13) "Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of

plague in your land? Now then think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.

Even though David had repented his sin had serious consequences. Three years of famine or three months of defeat at the enemy's hands or three days of plague. What a choice for David to make. Sin is not a light matter to God because He is Holy and undefiled and has called us as His people to be Holy before Him. Holiness is missing in many 'Super Churches' today. Many hunger and thirst for emotionally gratifying spiritual experiences, slick worship, for gifts, for healing, for prosperity and for blessings but very few hunger and thirst after righteousness and the holiness without which no one shall see the Lord.

What happens when church leaders count heads and play the numbers game and even refuse to be corrected? David had repented yet God still gave him three choices because of the seriousness of his sin. However, in a church where the leaders do not repent of this kind of thing there are three things that will ultimately happen.

Firstly, God will send them a famine for the Word of God and people will begin to die spiritually.

Secondly, He will cause the church to 'lose face' in the eyes of the world either through some division or through some act of immorality or dishonesty or work of the flesh. One scandal or another will ultimately immerge even splitting the church. Sometimes He will simply remove the power of His Spirit.

Thirdly, sickness, poverty and disease will hit the church and many will become sick and die. If God permitted this in David's case, even though he repented, what will be the case of those leaders who refuse to repent?

(Vs 14) "David said to God, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men."

Now David wasn't jumping around uncontrollably, rolling on the floor in ecstasy or laughing and howling like an animal and saying the Lord is doing a great thing. On the contrary he was in deep distress. Could this be said of most church leaders today who are playing the numbers game? Why, they are so occupied with the hype that they cannot even see their true spiritual condition before a Holy and Righteous God. Notice how David responded to this situation.

Firstly, he was deeply distressed. *Secondly*, He knew that his only hope for mercy was to fall into the hands of the Lord because David knew His mercy is great. *Thirdly*, he did not want to fall into the hands of unbelievers because of the disgrace it would bring to God's name.

Isn't it good to know that if any one sins we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the Righteous One who is not only the appeasing sacrifice for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world. David knew that God was a just and holy God but he also knew that God was a God of mercy as well.

In life God will always forgive us and cleanse us from sin when we truly confess it and repent of it before Him. *(1 John 1:9)* However there are always consequences of our sin that we must live with yet even in this God will give us grace to persevere in the ongoing consequences of our actions. As we will see the Lord delivered David and Israel through a blood sacrifice offered up on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. This was to be the future sight of Solomon's temple.

(Vs 15-16) (Read these verses)

So the Lord sent a plague and during a three day period 70,000 people died and when the angel went to destroy Jerusalem God stopped him. The Lord was grieved that He had afflicted His people and led them back to the place of sacrifice. There at the threshing floor of Arunah the Jebusite the Lord would once more stretch His golden sceptre of mercy over His people. Sometimes the Lord will permit a big church to split and often this removes the 'dead wood' yet if the people thoroughly repent and humble themselves before the Lord He will begin to rebuild them again according to His plan and not theirs. But He will always lead His people back to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. There on the threshing floor, the future sight of Solomon's temple David encountered the work of the cross in his life once again.

(Vs 17) "When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hands fall upon me and my family."

King David was a true shepherd after God's heart and did not blame anyone else but himself. He took responsibility for his actions and for the consequences of his actions. He didn't blame the people because he saw that they were just like sheep, easily led astray. What a contrast between his attitude and the attitude of many 'Super apostles' today who not only lead the sheep of God's pasture down the wrong track but refuse to accept the consequences of their actions. They blame others instead. Here we see the heart of Jesus expressed in David when he said, "Let your hand fall upon me and my family." Now notice what David did.

(Vs 18-25) (Read these verses)

There, on the threshing floor, David

built an altar to the Lord and offered up a burnt offering for his sin and the sin of the people. He paid the full purchase price of the threshing floor. There at the foot of the sacrificial offering David put things right with God and the plague was stopped. The secret of a successful church is when you find its leaders and its people kneeling at the foot of the cross. There is no blessing apart from the cross.

At the cross all rebellion, all sin and all pride are crucified there. Many church leaders today need to stop their hyped up worship, their craving for power and prestige, their emphasis on money their head counting and their big church growth programs and humbly come once more to the foot of the cross and stay there until the blood and the Spirit and the Word of Jesus Christ purges them clean from every sin. When we stay at the foot of the cross there will be no room for pride, for sin or for boasting about ones achievements.

There on the threshing floor David once more came to the foot of the cross of his Messiah. It wasn't the animal sacrifice that brought down God's mercy that day upon David and Israel but the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. It was His blood that cleansed David and stopped the plague of sin and death hovering over the Israelites.

Only at the foot of the cross can anyone be stripped of spiritual blindness and see their true condition before the Lord and that of His people and then cry out to Him for mercy and forgiveness. When the Holy Spirit brings us to the foot of the cross we see ourselves as we really are in God's sight and cry out to Him for mercy. When we do this He will hear our prayer, give us great mercy and abundantly pardon us, cleansing us from all sin through the blood and merits of His dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ. *(1 John 1:7-9)*

It may be that you are a church leader who has fallen into the second sin of David and you know that things are not right with the Lord or with your church. Then don't wait, cast out pride and the opinions of men and go to the threshing floor of the cross and there at the feet of the Lord Jesus confess your sin and the sin of your people and He will restore and strengthen you again for the task of shepherding His flock.

Conclusion

What happened to David and Israel is a lesson for our church leaders and for the church as a whole especially in the Western nations today. The Church that Jesus will come for will be vastly different than the one we see today with its slick programs, heady music, its secular marketing strategies for Church growth and its pop psychology and theology.

At the very end of this present age God will not bring spiritual victory over the antichrist through worldly methods or by overpowering numbers but by a very small faithful remnant. Just as the band of the Maccabees overcame the tyrant Antiochus so the faithful remnant will overcome the Antichrist not with the weapons of men but with the Sword of the Spirit. (*Revelation 12:11*)

In fact the Antichrist will destroy all church structures and denominations and ultimately the prostitute Church with its interfaith and ecumenical structures. (*Matthew 24:2*) (*Revelation 17:16-17*) Right at the end of this age the Antichrist will force the whole world to worship him as God and then destroy all religion. In that day no one will be able to buy or sell without having the number of his name on his or her forehead or hand.

Just before the first coming of Jesus the Roman Emperor Augustus counted peoples heads through a census to gain political, economical, social and religious control over the known world. Just before Jesus comes again the Antichrist will do the same thing. This is why God hates it when His people play the numbers game and count heads. Inevitably it always leads to pride and into the Devil's sin! What happened to David and Israel serves as a warning to us today. Some churches are into the numbers game in such a big way that God will have to deal with them as He dealt with Israel for doing the same thing.

BLOW THE TRUMPET IN ZION

" For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ "

