

315 *Love and wrath: a short PS*

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah."^{2 Sam 24:1}

God specifically says to David, 'Go and take a census'. So David tells his commanders to go throughout the land and count the men. But his ADC, Joab, is horrified: they are supposed to be relying on God for victory, not on the size of the army!

After the count, David realises his error, and repents before the LORD. But, instead of forgiving David, God gives him three choices: three years of famine in Israel, three months of David having to flee his enemies, or three days of plague on the land.^{v13}

David chooses the last: *So the LORD sent a plague on Israel... and seventy thousand people died.*^{v16}

That seems pretty clear to me: God tells David to do something (count his troops) and then, when he does so, as a punishment, God kills 70,000 people. What?!

But hang on (and it's Brad Jersak^{p202} who tipped me off), the exact same incident is also recorded in 1 Chron 21, where it says: ***Satan** rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.*^{v1} So, who *actually* incited David? God or Satan?

If I had been with Jesus as he sat in the synagogue discussing the Bible (OT) with his fellow Jews, I would have asked, how does he square 2 Sam 24 with his teaching about God as his loving, prodigal father?

After wrestling long and hard with this sort of issue, I have concluded that, while the authors were definitely inspired, they weren't infallible. They were creatures of their time and their view of God was, at times, distorted.

On the Tutu principle, God cooperates with fallible humans to bring about his purposes, so he inspired people to write the Bible, and inspired their content. For example, look back to that very chapter:

Realising his folly, David says, *'Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for **his mercy is great.***^{v14}

*The LORD felt **very sorry** about the terrible things that had happened. He said to the Angel who was destroying the people 'That is enough put down your arm!'*^{v16}

Throughout the Old Testament we are pointed towards God's love and mercy, and God's Great Plan is there for all to see.