

He Makes All Things Beautiful – 1 Chronicles 21

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read Psalm 30

B. Back Story

1. A “back story” is the tale of how something came to be.
2. The back story for Psalm 30 is *fascinating*. We find it here in 1 Chronicles 21 . . .

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

¹ Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.

1. Ezra the scribe wrote Chronicles for the generation that had returned from Babylon.
 - a. They needed strong encouragement to rebuild Jerusalem & the temple.
 - b. That’s why most of David’s blunders are left out of Chronicles.
2. And it’s why what we read here *differs* from the same story told in 2 Samuel 24.
 - a. There it says God was angry with Israel & moved David to take a census.
 - b. Here it says Satan rose up against Israel.
 - c. So, which was it – God or the devil?
3. The answer is, **BOTH!**
 - a. This took place at the end of David’s reign.
 - b. It comes *after* the rebellions of his son Absalom & another pretender named Sheba.
 - c. God was angry with the people of Israel for so often turning against the one *He’d* ordained king.
 - d. So He allowed Satan to tempt David to take this census.

4. This was God’s purpose to discipline His people & bring them to repentance.
5. Satan’s plan was to destroy Israel & thought to do so by tempting David to pride.
 - a. There was nothing inherently wrong with numbering the people.
 - b. God had ordered a census at a couple points in their history.
 - c. *David’s error* lay in his MOTIVE; He *knew* what he was doing went against God’s will that he, *as king*, put his reliance only on God.
 - d. From those counted we discover David wanted to know how many battle-ready troops he could command.
 - e. This was a blatant violation of the spirit of the law which forbade him amassing military might.
 - f. God wanted the king to depend on Him, not the size of his army.
6. This census was a colossal appeal to pride & it was the work of Israel’s adversary – Satan.
7. He was seeking an occasion to harm God’s people, as he does *in every age*.

8. The great lesson of this chapter begins right here –
 - a. While *Satan* was the agent who acted on David & got this whole thing started,
 - b. *God* was ultimately at work *behind the scenes* to accomplish something astounding.
 - c. It isn’t till the *end* of the story we see what that was.
 - d. And that’s a major part of what God wants us to see in all this.
 - 1) While we live this life, we don’t often see what God is doing.
 - 2) We see the day to day; we live in the events of our unfolding story & don’t discern how God is at work behind the scenes.
 - 3) Like David here, all we see is the trouble; the mistakes, errors, failures, trials, challenges.
 - 4) It looks like everything is falling apart - & sometimes, *because of our own foolishness*.
 - e. What we need to understand is that God is committed to us & our redemption.

- 1) He's not only the *Author* of our salvation → He's also the *Finisher*.
 - 2) What He's begun, He'll complete.
 - 3) When the dark clouds of adversity roll in, He's the sun still shining behind them & will ultimately burn thru.
- f. [Tapestries at the Vatican.]

B. Vs. 2-4

² So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know *it*." ³ And Joab answered, "May the LORD make His people a hundred times more than they are. But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?" ⁴ Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Therefore Joab departed and went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusalem.

1. David not only studied the scriptures himself, he made sure that entire royal court had been well taught as well.
2. So when he gave the command to Joab as commander of the army to conduct this census, *he knew* it was foolish & tried to talk David out of it. But the king would allow no dissent.
3. Samuel tells us they spent 10 months collecting the data.

C. Vs. 5-6

⁵ Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to David. All Israel *had* 1,100,000 men who drew the sword, and Judah *had* 470,000 men who drew the sword. ⁶ But he did not count Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

1. Because Joab knew the census was ill-advised, he purposely left out a couple tribes.

D. "Choose"

1. In the next vs., God sends the prophet Gad to David to tell him he's erred & there will be consequences.
2. David has to choose what form they'll take – 3 *years* of famine, 3 *months* of military defeat, or 3 *days* of plague.
3. David chose plague, & 70,000 fell.
4. It seems unfair that trouble would come *on the people* when it was David's error.
 - a. Why should they suffer for his sin?
 - b. Well, there are 2 reasons –
 - 1) Remember the origin of all this was God's anger at Israel's rebellion.
 - Knowing the justice of God, there's good reason to assume those who died in this plague were the main rebels.
 - 2) Even then, this really *was* a judgment of David.
 - He loved the people & was smitten with deep grief over their distress.
 - He realized with bitter regret that as king his actions affected others.
 - Just as his obedience had brought untold blessing to the nation, his disobedience now brought trouble.
 - David's *response* to the plague reveals how profoundly sorry he was for his sin.
5. The plague spread thru the entire nation & arrived at Jerusalem on the 3rd day –

E. Vs. 15-18

¹⁵ And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the LORD looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, "It is

enough; now restrain your hand.” And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

1. Not long after the plague arrived in the vicinity of Jerusalem, the time ran out for the judgment.
2. God halted the judging angel at a place where grain was threshed.
 - a. It was owned by a man named *Ornan*, one of the people who’d lived there before David conquered the city.
 - b. He’d become a loyal subject of Israel.

¹⁶ Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces.

3. As soon as David realized his error, he repented & called the other officials to join him in donning sackcloth for a time of earnest seeking of God.
4. God opened David’s eyes to see the angel poised ready to strike. He didn’t know that God had halted his progress.

¹⁷ And David said to God, “Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O LORD my God, be against me and my father’s house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued.”

5. David is torn up that others are suffering for his error.

¹⁸ Therefore, the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

6. Just as the prophet was sent to David with the message of judgment, now he’s sent with a message of mercy.
 - a. But David must learn that mercy arrives on the wings of sacrifice.
 - b. God justice can’t be ignored; it must be *satisfied*.
 7. In order to stay judgment, an altar must be built & a sacrifice made.
 8. The place where justice & mercy met was Ornan’s threshing floor.
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9. So David went to him & asked to buy the place, as well as the oxen & implements he was using to thresh his grain.
 - a. Being polite & following the customs of the day, Ornan began bargaining & negotiating a price.
 - b. Because of who David was, Ornan offered it at well below market price, hoping to gain some royal & political capital out of it.
 - c. But David knew this wasn’t the time or place to bargain. He needed to do business with God, not man. == So, v. 24

F. Vs. 24-

²⁴ Then King David said to Ornan, “No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing.”

10. Take careful note of this; it’s crucial to understanding what’s going on here. We’ll come back to it in a bit.

²⁵ So David gave Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the place. ²⁶ And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.

11. David had an altar built, broke up the wooden threshing gear, then sacrificed the oxen & laid them out on the wood.

12. Then the most important moment came; the crucial event that opened David's eyes to what was *really* going on here –
13. God sent fire to ignite the offering, just as He had in the first tabernacle, to show His approval & acceptance of the meeting place.
14. God later sent fire to consume the sacrifices made in the temple, which was built on this exact spot.
15. You see, *that's* what David realized when the fire fell that day at Ornan's threshing floor – that everything that had happened was engineered by God to reveal **where He wanted the temple built.**
16. Look at 22:1 –

Then David said, “This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel.”

- a. The emphasis here is on the word “*This!*”
 - b. This is David's Aha!-moment;
 - c. When he realized, while *he'd* messed up *royally* goofed (pun intended), **God** had turned his error into a huge blessing.
17. You see, this place, Ornan's threshing floor, was God's choice for where the temple would stand.
19. Years before, David made plans to build a permanent home for the ark.
- a. But God put the kibosh on those plans.
 - b. He told David while He was pleased with his desire to build a temple, David was a man of war & *couldn't* build it.
 - c. His son who reigned after him would be a man of peace; **HE** would build it.
 - d. So as ch. 22 tells us, David reasoned, “If I can't *build* the temple, I can at least prepare so when Solomon takes the throne, everything will be ready.”
 - e. He spent years drawing up plans & setting aside the materials.
 - f. The one thing David didn't have figured out was *where* to build it.
 - g. Just as God had always shown where to set up the tabernacle, God would need to show them where He wanted the temple.
 - h. *This* was the moment & event where David realized God was making His will known.

III. CONCLUSION

A. The Lesson

1. Ornan's threshing floor, located on Mt. Zion just north of Jerusalem's city wall, was the same place Father Abraham had prepared to offer his beloved son Isaac a thousand years before.
 2. It's the same place a thousand years after this, God the Father offered up *His* beloved Son, Jesus Christ.
 3. It's where the temple was built – a place where God & man could meet *because* of the offering of a sacrifice.
 - a. It was a place of *atonement, redemption, & salvation.*
 - b. Mt. Zion where the temple stood stretches north via a ridge called Calvary, where the cross of Jesus was placed.
 - c. And just as David paid the full price to purchase it – so Jesus there paid the full price to purchase us.
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4. From one perspective, as we read this story everything looks like failure & loss.
 - a. Satan managed to pull one over on David. He messed up & ordered the census. A plague killed 70,000.
 - b. It's a sad, dark tale that when you compare the tellings in Samuel & Chronicles raises a bunch of difficult questions.

- c. That's very much like our lives.
 - 1) Even those of us who've walked with God for years & grown deep in spiritual things, we mess up!
 - 2) We do & say things that later we look back on & say, "What was I thinking? What's wrong with me?"
 - 3) A plague of trouble follows & everywhere we look all we see are more questions.
- 5. That's the way it seemed to David as he stood there on Mt. Zion looking at the angel with drawn sword.
 - a. He cried out in desperation to God, admitting his error & pleading with God to stay His wrath.
 - b. God's answer was to build an altar & make a sacrifice.
 - c. It was *then* that fire fell & David's eyes were opened.
 - d. In a flash of revelation he realized while he'd played the fool to Satan's scheme –
 - e. **God had been at work all along** to steer their folly toward this moment when he would realize this was the place God wanted the temple built.
 - f. In fact, God did MORE than just reveal this as the place.
 - 1) David realized what *God intended to use this place for* –
 - 2) It was the place where His justice would be satisfied in the offering of THE Sacrifice.
 - 3) This was the *place of atonement*, the *location of redemption*, where all that had been lost in the Fall would be reclaimed.
 - 4) This was where the serpent's head would be crushed by the bruising of the Savior's heel.
 - g. Just as God turned David's folly to blessing, so here in this same spot, God would turn the greatest folly of the human race to our greatest blessing at the Cross.
- 6. Though it would be another thousand years before the Apostle Paul would write it – David discovered the truth of Romans 8:28-29 –

All things work together for good for those who love God and are the called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

- 7. [The puzzle]
 - a. All afternoon a little boy tried to put a puzzle together but had no luck.
 - b. Frustrated, he put all the pieces back in the box & handed it to his dad saying, "I can't do it. You give it a try."
 - c. To his amazement, his father assembled the entire puzzle in a few minutes.
 - d. The boy was astonished at how easily his father had been able to do what to him was so hard.
 - e. He asked, "How'd you do that?"
 - f. The father replied, "Well, the cover shows what the picture looks like when it's completed. I just put the pieces where they belonged in the picture."
 - g. The boy said, "Oh! I was trying to find how all the pieces fit one another."
- 8. Many of us are *stuck* & frustrated because we've been trying to fit the various pieces of our lives together.
- 9. We've been trying to figure things out from our limited, earth-bound perspective.
- 10. We must realize that behind it all, *our back-story*, is that God is at work in all things to make us just like Jesus.

B. The Sacrifice

- 1. As we end today, take careful note of where all of this became clear for David – when he fixed his attention on the sacrifice.
- 2. It was when David *realized God's acceptance of that sacrifice* that everything became crystal to him.

3. So it is for us.
 - a. If your life seems like a mess – If you’ve made some hideous decisions & now suffer hard consequences,
 - b. If the future seems bleak & you wonder how it’s all going to turn out –
 - c. Take your eyes off your failure, all the things you’ve done & the consequences you’re suffering,
 - d. And put them on the cross, on the sacrifice God accepts that’s been offered on your behalf.
 - e. Realize that there’s NOTHING God will not do to save you, to redeem you.
4. If he can turn 1 Chr. 21 into 1 Chr. 22 – if he can turn the cross into the crown – oh friend, He can turn your trials to gold!
5. The key is to fix your eyes on the Cross.