
Resolving the Number Disparities Between 2 Samuel 24 & 1 Chronicles 21

Excerpt from the Apples of Gold Collection

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And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were **in Israel** eight hundred thousand **valiant men** that drew the sword; and the men of Judah *were* five hundred thousand men. (2 Samuel 24:9, KJB)

And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And **all *they of Israel*** were a thousand thousand (a million) and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah *was* four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. (1 Chronicles 21:5, KJB)

First, God's Word assures us there can be no errors in the Holy Scripture, scribal or otherwise, for God has many times promised to *preserve* His Word (e.g., Isaiah 40:8; Psalms 12:6; Mark 13:31, etc.). Therefore we know that a reasonable solution is to be forthcoming.

The apparent discrepancy may be readily resolved by simply seeing that the differences reveal the number of those who are ready trained and combat proven as compared to those who are young, in training, and not yet combat tested. This may be seen by observing that Israel is singled out in 2 Samuel 24 as having had 800,000 "valiant men" (i.e., already trained and battle proven warriors) but that the total number in her ranks was 1,100,000 ("all") in 1 Chronicles 21. Thus the 10 tribes of Israel had 300,000 unproven, untested soldiers in their army.

Although the same distinction is not actually stated with regard to Judah (which includes the tribe of Benjamin), by applying the same principle we conclude that of her 500,000 warriors all but 30,000 were battle proven. Though we deem this as the best resolution, another is that many served in the quartermaster corps, medical corps, ordinance, as cooks, caring for the animals (today, in the motor pools), in food supply, logistics etc., and these would *not* be numbered with the active combatants.

As to the apparent contradiction between

So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall **seven years of famine** come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. (2 Samuel 24:13)

So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee Either **three years' famine**; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh *thee*; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. (1 Chronicles 21:5, KJB)

whereby one may wonder whether it was 7 years of famine or 3, the resolution is straightforward and unmistakable. First, remember that Samuel and Chronicles were written nearly 500 years apart. This fact alone often accounts for some of the disparities and/or differences between these

books (i.e., cities change names over the years as in America “New Amsterdam” later became “New York”; spelling conventions change with time, etc.).

Here, the solution is seen in that at the time the prophet Gad puts God’s 3 choices before the king the nation had *already* been in 4 years of drought and famine preceding David’s dilemma (See: 2 Sam. 21:1 = 3 years: to which we must add 21:9-10 = 1 month plus; 24:8 = 9 months and 20 days of numbering the people. These total to well “into the 4th year”). Thus having just endured 4 years of famine and comparing the two accounts, we see that David is being asked if he prefers to endure 3 more years of drought and famine, which would bring the total to 7, or one of the other choices.

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