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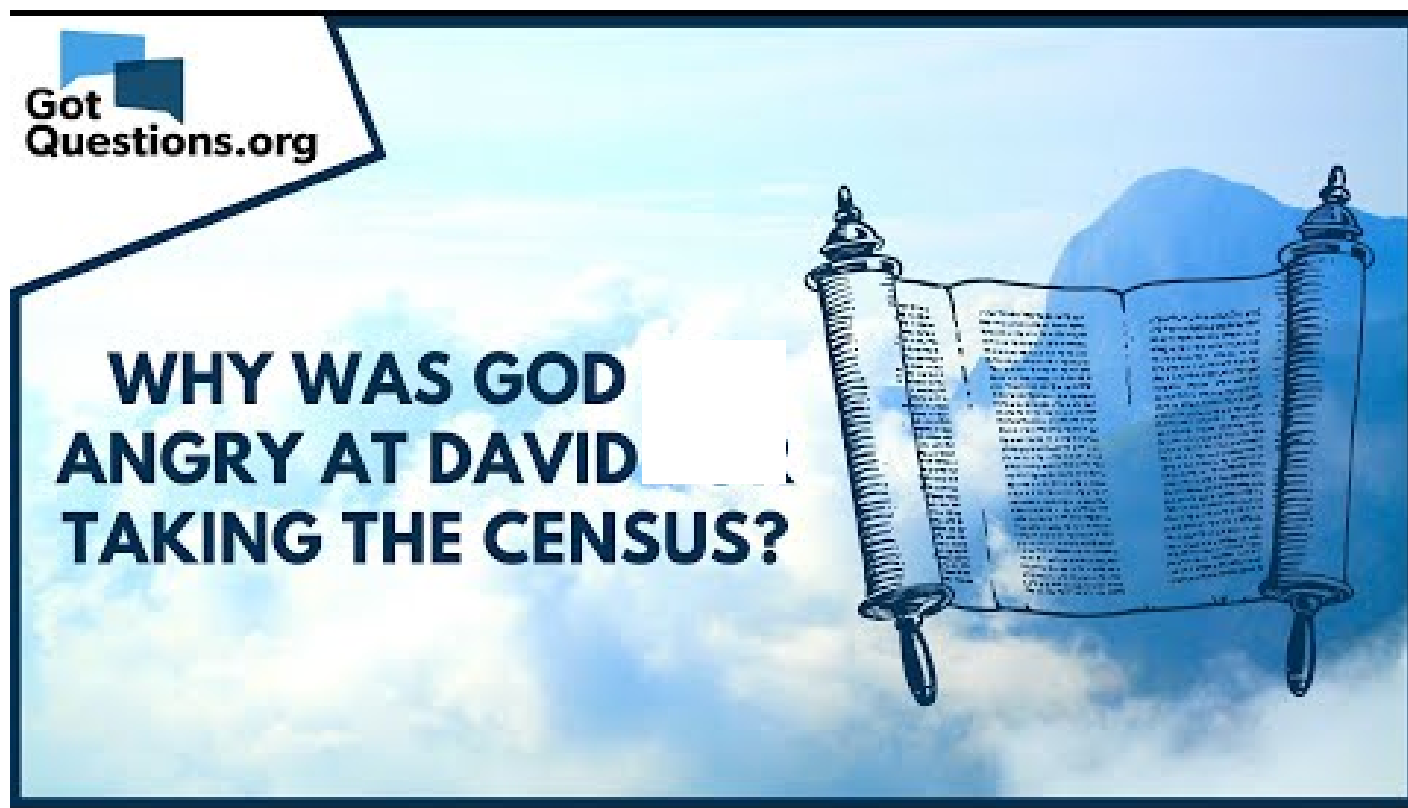
QUESTION

Why was God so angry at David for taking the census?

ANSWER

[Second Samuel 24:1](#) says, "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.'" The parallel account of the incident surrounding the census, however, reveals it was Satan who incited David to take the census: "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel" ([1 Chronicles 21:1](#)). This discrepancy is often explained by the understanding that, in order to achieve His purposes, sometimes God sovereignly permits Satan to act. God can use Satan in various ways, with the result being the refining, disciplining, and purification of disobedient believers ([Luke 22:31-32](#); [1 Corinthians 5:1-5](#); [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)). Such might have been the case with David. God allowed Satan to tempt him, and David sinned, rearing up a pride, and God then dealt with David accordingly.

pride, and God then dealt with David accordingly.



There are other considerations concerning the passages relating David's sinful census. Here is [2 Samuel 24:1](#) in four translations:

"Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them . . ." (NIV).

"Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them . . ." (ESV).

"And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them . . ." (KJV).

"Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them . . ." (NASB).

Note that the New American Standard Bible says "it" (the anger of the Lord) is what caused David to take the census. The other translations say "he" (the Lord) did the inciting. The reason for the differences in translation is that, in the original language, there is no subject for the verb *incited*. The fact is we aren't told who exactly moved David to take the census. To translate the verse literally, we would say, "There was who moved David against them" or "For one moved David against them." The translations above have taken this to mean it was either God or His anger that caused David to take the census. But there are other options:

- The unstated thing that moved David to conduct the census could have been David’s own evil imagination.
- The “one” who moved David could be Satan, as [1 Chronicles 21:1](#) says.
- The “adversary” (the meaning of the word *Satan*) mentioned in 1 Chronicles could be someone other than the devil; it could have been an unnamed counselor to David who prompted him into a foolish (or sinful) action.

up to God to command a census, and if David counted he should only have done it at God’s command, receiving a ransom to “atone” for the counting. This is why God was angry again with Israel and is also why David was “conscience-stricken” after he counted Israel. David knew it was wrong and begged God to take away the guilt of his sin ([2 Samuel 24:10](#)).

God gave David a choice of three punishments for his sin—three years of famine, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or three days of plague. David chose the third, and the Lord then punished Israel with a plague that killed 70,000 men from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. As for why God punished the whole nation for the sin of the king, that is exactly the question David asks in [2 Samuel 24:17](#). Why, when he was the one who had sinned, did the people have to suffer? He even requested that God’s hand be against him and his family only, and that God would spare the people. But, as with the account of Job, God chose not to give a reason for His actions. Perhaps it was because of Israel’s multiplied sins and rebellion against God throughout the centuries. Perhaps it was a lesson to the people (and to us as well) that the people suffer when their leaders go astray. The reality is that God didn’t justify His actions with a reason, nor does He have to.

Of the three choices presented to David, the first two would have involved some level of dependency upon the mercy of man: the warfare, of course, would be as severe as the enemy wanted it to be; the famine would require Israel to seek food from other nations, relying on the pity of their neighbors. Instead of relying on the mercy of any human, David chose to rely on the mercy of God—the [pestilence](#) was, after all, the most direct form of punishment from God, and in the plague they could only look to God for relief.

The psalmist tells us, *As for God, His way is perfect* ([Psalm 10:5](#)). If God's ways are perfect, then we can trust that whatever He does—and whatever He allows—is also perfect. Our responsibility to God is to obey Him, to trust Him, and to submit to His will, whether we understand it or not.

As we see in [2 Samuel 24:16](#), God was grieved because of the things that were happening to His people, and He called off the punishment. Even in His rebuke God still shows His love and mercy.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [Bible Answers for Almost All Your Questions by Elmer L. Towns](#)
- [More insights from your Bible study - Get Started with Logos Bible Software for Free!](#)

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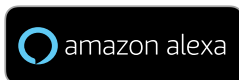
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