

The Census & the Cause of Christ

Most of us are familiar with the fact that Jesus was born in Judea in a year of a Roman census. (Luke 2:1-5) Census taking in the Roman Empire, generally affected the taking of taxes and the allocation of imperial resources to public works. Likewise, in America, census usually accompany allocation of resources to the states ... and relate somewhat to taxation. This year, for example, the Census will be taken during the same season as taxes are gathered in by the IRS. Government officials will be allocated according to the number of people discovered.

What does that have to do with the rest of the Bible and the cause of Jesus other than an off-hand comment that helps us properly place the birth of Jesus in historical time?

In 1 Chronicles 20, almost 1000 years before the birth of Jesus, David the forefather of Jesus took a census of fighting men in his day. Joab his general objected, but the king prevailed. The king had been fighting a battle for years to establish the LORD's people secure in the land. He wanted to ensure he had adequate personnel to fight if they needed to do so again. Where was the Kingdom after all those years? The curse that followed David's decision resulted in the death of thousands of men in Israel. The Lord made it plain that the curse which lasted for days upon the land was the result of the unwise taking of a census. 70,000 people died.

Just as Israel had fighting surrounding nations for a generation or two (the reigns of 2 kings, 40 years each), the USA has seen at least 80 years of regular waves of global conflict and war. Most recently the USA has been fighting the heirs of Edom, that forebear of Islam. The President has staked his administration on preserving the nation and the people of God. We may be charitable and assume that he is doing all he knows to do to lead the battles we are facing. However, not a few people are dying. Currently the flu along with COVID-19 are plaguing the land along with any number of other illnesses, disorders, and diseases that could be prevented. Suicide is killing far more youth and soldiers each year than COVID-19 has killed globally so far. Rumors of conflict arise in the news as there is regular talk of police brutality and occasional terror strikes and school shootings. An outsider's perspective could lead to the conclusion that there is a curse in the land.

Perhaps we can learn something from David's response to the curse: He invested in land to be used as a house of prayer for all nations. He bought the threshing floor from someone who was present where the plague stopped, and David dedicated that land to serve as the foundation for the Temple. The same area where Jesus would later be dedicated to His Father as a baby, as an adolescent, and as an adult. God used the disaster of an unwise census to prepare the way for His Kingdom agenda.

What was wrong with the census?

In the book of the Law in Exodus 30:12-16, the LORD says that whenever a census was taken, all those 20 years old or more were to give an offering equivalent to ½ Shekel. The value of a shekel has fluctuated over time, as has the standard weight of the unit. At times, ancients were paid as much as 7-10 shekels per month in the ancient world. So, a Shekel paid for as little as 2 day's wages at times. A half-shekel would have paid approximately 1 day's wage for a common laborer. If a day's work is 8 good hours at minimum wage, you are looking at ~\$80. (\$120 if you work for 12 hours of daylight! Or maybe you earn more than minimum wage)

If that seems to be a burden, another way of figuring the value of a shekel is to look at the weight of a shekel since the word *shekel* means *weight*: A shekel was the basic silver coin of that day, of whatever nation. In the days of the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, a half shekel weighed about 8.6 grams of silver (Jesus seems to have critiqued the cheap money changers and the low value of their temple coinage, and thus prophesied its collapse in the gospels.) The value would have approximately been \$5 in today's market. Another way to calculate, would be to figure the value of the main American Silver Coin now made: one troy ounce coins are valued at around \$15 if you sell them to a dealer, or you can buy them for \$30. So, if \$30 is a shekel, then \$15 is a half-shekel.

David prayed that the guilt for the wicked census would not be on the people but would be on his family and on his house forever. He did not collect this amount from the people to be put it in the temple treasury, instead he bought the land for the temple. However, can a building and religious services remove guilt? No, Jesus, the Son of David removed that guilt by bearing the sins of His people as the King of the Jews upon the Roman cross outside the city. *Jesus was rejected, yet He knew He'd win the hearts of all nations. Has Jesus won your heart? Have you received the mercy the Messiah made available when He offered Himself up for many?*

What was the spiritual responsibility of the people of God during a time of census?

God's people are to invest in the house or center of prayer. Let me encourage you to make a special offering to the Lord's house of somewhere from \$5 to \$15 to \$80 (or more if the Spirit so leads you), per adult person to pledge loyalty to God's call to pray. Perhaps you already tithe to your local church, but you really want to honor the Lord's call to pray for all nations, which is commanded in Psalm 2:8 and Isaiah 56:7 and Mark 11:15-19. You could give a special gift, of the weight that accords with your commitment to pray for God's Kingdom to Come, to a ministry that is focused on the nations. Not just your own nation. A ministry equipping you to pray for other nations & the advancement of Jesus' kingdom. You are after all, a kingdom of priests. You are welcome to donate to this ministry which regularly offers and shares prayer for those nations and peoples and individuals of the world that are outside of the realm of Christ's honor, which is their obedience to His name. (Perhaps you guessed I'd say that.) 😊 But, if you feel uncomfortable donating to the work that I do to advance the Father's kingdom, I would be happy to suggest some other ministries that are also raising prayer among the nations. Remember, giving to the Lord's work (and I'm much less concerned if I gain from this teaching than if you do), is a privilege. *I have personally seen the Lord's healing and protecting hand on me as I sought to obey this simple teaching.* It has led to some significant gifts to ministries promoting prayer for the nations ... *and it has resulted in lives and nations being changed.* I am committed to promote prayer for unreached Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist lands and direct my investments accordingly, to the Father's glory.

I do not want the King to return and ask me why I have invested so little into His business. **Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** Are you merely investing in your own time to worship and spiritual services that cater to you? Or **are you investing in prayer for the nations**, as David, Solomon, and Jesus did?

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