

Shayla: Does the biblical account of David's census contradict itself?

Midrash:

- [2 Samuel 24:1 HCSB](#) The LORD's anger burned against Israel again, and it stirred up David against them to say: "Go, count *the people of* Israel and Judah."
- [1 Chronicles 21:1 HCSB](#) Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to count *the people of* Israel.

Samuel says that it was the Lord's anger that stirred up David to have a census. Ezra says that it was Satan. Which is correct? Both. Samuel tells the reason, Ezra tells us the method.

Some may argue against the Lord using Satan in this manner but may I remind you of another account (also by the prophet Samuel)?

- [1 Samuel 16:14-15 HCSB](#) Now the Spirit of the LORD had left Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD began to torment him, (15) so Saul's servants said to him, "You see that an evil spirit from God is tormenting you."
- [1 Samuel 16:23 HCSB](#) Whenever the spirit from God troubled Saul, David would pick up his harp and play, and Saul would then be relieved, feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

Evil spirits want to torment humans anyway. Satan is always happy to destroy any human he can. God simply allowed the evil spirit to do what came naturally to it and in the process accomplished His own good will. We need to be grateful that Hashem is always protecting us and stir up within us a holy fear of grieving the Holy Spirit who is our seal and protection.

This is further confirmed by the account of what was happening behind the scenes when the zakain Job was attacked by Satan.

- [Job 1:9-12 HCSB](#) Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? (10) Haven't You placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are spread out in the land. (11) But stretch out Your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse You to Your face." (12) "Very well," the LORD told Satan, "everything he owns is in your power. However, you must not lay a hand on Job *himself*." So Satan went out from the LORD's presence.
- [Job 2:3-7 HCSB](#) Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil. He still retains his integrity, even though you incited Me against him, to destroy him without just cause." (4) "Skin for skin!" Satan answered the LORD. "A man will give up everything he owns in exchange for his life. (5) But stretch out Your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse You to Your face." (6) "Very well," the LORD told Satan, "he is in your power; only spare his life." (7) So Satan left the LORD's presence and infected Job with incurable boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head.

Again we see that in his wickedness Satan already wanted to destroy Job. As it is said, "Sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you" (Genesis 4:7). And "Satan has asked to sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). And "Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour."

The Lord has his own goals in mind, and He found Satan's hatred useful for His own good purposes. It is important to not ea couple of things however. First, Adonai puts strict limits on what Satan is allowed to do, as the Apostle taught,

- [1 Corinthians 10:13 HCSB](#) No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you

are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so that you are able to bear it.

Second, though the Lord may use Satan or our enemies' own evil inclinations for His own good and perfect will, any who fall for it will, in the end be destroyed for touching His people.

- [Isaiah 10:5-6 HCSB](#) Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger--the staff in their hands is My wrath. (6) I will send him against a godless nation; I will command him *to go* against a people destined for My rage, to take spoils, to plunder, and to trample them down like clay in the streets.
- [Isaiah 10:12 HCSB](#) But when the Lord finishes all His work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, *He will say*, "I will punish the king of Assyria for his arrogant acts and the proud look in his eyes."

God used Assyria's desire to destroy Israel to discipline His people. As it is said, "the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and punishes every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6) and "judgment begins with God's household" (1 Peter 4:17). However, He kept the Assyrians from accomplishing their purpose and protected a faithful remnant. Soon afterward, the Assyrians were destroyed for their hubris and our people rose again.

That's how sovereign and omnipotent our God is. He can even use Satan's work against him! He can turn the evil Haman's machinations against him, causing him to be hung on the very gallows he hoped to hang God's man on (Esther 7:9-10). He can cause the cadavers of Ahab's sons to be tossed into the very vineyard he conspired to have God's man killed for (2 Kings 9:25-26). As it is said,

- [Romans 8:28-31 HCSB](#) We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. (29) For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified. (31) What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?