

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: David's Census and the Threshing Floor

1 Chronicles 21:1-22:19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson must hold a narrow and crucial line. Scripture names Satan as the one who moved David (1 Chronicles 21:1), yet David, with no shifting of blame, says, I have sinned greatly. The Bible never lets the existence of a tempter erase human responsibility, and it never collapses into the fatalism that says we cannot help what we do. Ezekiel 18:20 settles it: each soul answers for its own sin. At the same time, this passage refuses to leave us in despair, for the same God who disciplines is the God who provides an altar of mercy on the threshing floor. We must teach both the seriousness of sin and consequence and the depth of grace, without softening either.

But this lesson is not only about getting the categories right. It aims at the heart of the student. Every one of us is tempted to manage our sin instead of confessing it, to offer God the cheap and convenient, and to be so undone by a failure that we quit. David shows us another way: own it fully, worship at real cost, and then spend the rest of your days laboring for the house of God. The threshing floor points us forward, without anachronism, to the cross, where the justice that demanded a price and the mercy that paid it met in the body of Jesus. The aim is that the student leave not merely informed about David but changed, walking in honest repentance and costly devotion.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does David's census reveal about the particular danger of pride, and why was numbering the people an offense against the God who had always been Israel's true strength?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The census itself was not wrong in every circumstance; the Law provided for numbering Israel with an atonement payment (Exodus 30:11-16). What made David's count an offense was its motive and its trust. He was measuring the strength of his kingdom by the size of his army, taking comfort in the numbers rather than in the God who had delivered him from Goliath, from Saul, and from the Philistines when he had nothing but a sling and a covenant.

Even Joab, no model of piety, sensed the danger and pleaded with the king to stop (1 Chronicles 21:3). When the worldly soldier is more spiritually alert than the man after God's own heart, pride has done its blinding work. This is the peculiar peril of pride: it is loudest in our successes and quietest in our conscience.

Chronicles was written for the returned exiles, a small and vulnerable remnant tempted to measure their future by their meager resources. The Chronicler holds up David's failure as a warning: do not find your security in numbers. Israel's strength was never in her census; it was in her covenant Lord.

Apply this to the heart. We are all tempted to quantify our worth and our safety, by income, by influence, by the size of our circle. The sin is not in counting; it is in trusting the count.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride often hides inside reasonable, even admirable, activity.
- Trusting in resources rather than in God is a recurring covenant failure.
- Spiritual blindness can afflict mature believers in their strongest seasons.
- Chronicles addresses a remnant tempted to despair over small numbers.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'numbers' do you instinctively check to feel secure?
- Why might success be more spiritually dangerous than hardship?
- How does covenant faith reframe the way we view our resources?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to take a quiet census of your own resources, accomplishments, or following, and to draw security from the count rather than from the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Pride rarely announces itself. It feels like wisdom, like stewardship, like simply knowing where we stand. David likely told himself he was being a responsible king. The line between godly planning and self-reliant counting runs straight through the heart's motive.

Ask students to locate their own census habits. For some it is the bank balance, for others the number of followers, the comparison of their family to others, the tally of accomplishments on a resume. None of these are evil in themselves, yet each can quietly become the place we go for the security only God can give.

The remedy is not to stop being responsible but to keep returning trust to its proper home. Counting becomes sin when the count, not the Lord, is what lets us sleep at night.

Invite honest self-examination here. The goal is not guilt for being organized but freedom from the slow drift of misplaced trust.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-reliance can masquerade as competence.
- Comparison feeds pride and erodes contentment in God.
- Security drawn from resources is fragile and idolatrous.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you go first when you feel insecure?
- What would change if your security rested in God's covenant rather than your count?
- How can responsible planning stay surrendered to God?

Question 3

Student Question:

How do verses like 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 21:8 hold together the reality of the tempter and the reality of David's personal guilt, and what does this teach us about blaming our sin on outside forces?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

1 Chronicles 21:1 says Satan stood up and moved David, while the parallel in 2 Samuel 24:1 speaks of the Lord's anger as the backdrop. Scripture presents both: God in His sovereignty permitting the test, the adversary tempting, and David choosing. The Bible holds these together without resolving them into either fatalism or excuse.

What is striking is David's response in 21:8: I have sinned greatly in that I have done. He does not say the devil made me do it. James 1:13–15 explains the mechanism: temptation comes from outside, but sin is born when our own desire conceives and consents. The tempter cannot force the will.

This is doctrinally vital against any teaching that erases human accountability. Ezekiel 18:20 is plain: the soul that sins shall die. We do not inherit another's guilt, and we cannot offload our own onto Satan or circumstance.

Teach the balance pastorally. Naming a real adversary keeps us vigilant; naming our real responsibility keeps us honest. Remove either and we are in danger, either careless or self-deceived.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture affirms both a real tempter and real human responsibility.
- Temptation is not sin; consent is (James 1:13–15).
- Blaming our sin on outside forces is a form of self-deception.
- Each person bears his own guilt (Ezekiel 18:20), against inherited or excused guilt.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we take temptation seriously without using it as an excuse?
- Why is 'the devil made me do it' both partly true and deeply dangerous?
- What does genuine ownership of sin sound like?

Question 4

Student Question:

When you fall, do you reach first for an excuse or for confession, and what has that pattern been costing your walk with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the consequences arrived, David's instinct was confession, not cover-up. Compare this with our reflex to explain, minimize, or shift blame the moment we are caught. The first words out of our mouths after a failure reveal a great deal about the state of our hearts.

Excuse-making feels protective but it keeps the wound infected. Confession stings but it opens the way to healing and restored fellowship (1 John 1:9). David models the painful honesty that grace makes possible.

Help students see the cost of the excuse-pattern: it postpones repentance, hardens the conscience, and strains intimacy with God. A habit of self-justification slowly makes us strangers to honest prayer.

Encourage a concrete practice: when convicted, say the true thing first. Name the sin as sin before God before reaching for any context.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our first reaction to being caught exposes our heart.
- Excuse-making delays repentance and hardens the conscience.
- Confession restores fellowship (1 John 1:9).

Discussion Prompts

- What is your default reaction when confronted with a fault?
- How has excuse-making cost you in your walk with God?
- What would it take to make confession your first response?

Question 5

Student Question:

Why does David insist on paying full price for the threshing floor, refusing to offer to God that which costs him nothing (1 Chronicles 21:24), and what does true sacrifice cost?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ornan offered to give David the threshing floor, the oxen, and the wood for free. David refused: I will not take that which is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost (1 Chronicles 21:24). He paid the full price. Real worship is never free to the worshiper.

This is one of the great principles of true devotion. A gift that costs us nothing expresses nothing. David understood that an offering is a measure of the heart, and a costless offering measures a careless heart.

Set this against the temptation to give God the convenient slice of our time, money, and energy, the leftover hour, the spare change, the attention we have nothing better to do with. The threshing floor confronts that whole approach.

Note the trajectory: this costly purchase secures the very ground of the future temple. Costly obedience often lays a foundation whose full value we do not yet see.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship that costs nothing reveals a heart that values little.
- Sacrifice is the measure of devotion, not surplus giving.
- God deserves our best, not our leftovers.
- Costly obedience often lays foundations for future blessing.

Discussion Prompts

- What has your worship actually cost you lately?
- Where are you offering God the convenient rather than the costly?
- How does costly giving shape the heart of the giver?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where have you been offering God leftovers, the convenient and the cheap, rather than worship that genuinely costs you something?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move from David's altar to the student's life. Where have we settled into leftover religion: the prayer squeezed into the last conscious minute, the gift given from surplus, the service rendered only when nothing else competes?

Leftovers are not necessarily small in quantity; they are small in priority. The issue is whether God receives our first and best or merely what remains after everything else is satisfied (compare Malachi 1:6–8).

This question is meant to provoke honest, specific reflection, not vague guilt. Invite students to name one concrete area where they have been giving God the cheap option.

The goal is not to manufacture heroics but to recalibrate priority, to put God first in time, treasure, and attention as a settled pattern.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Leftover worship reflects misplaced priorities.
- God claims our first and best, not our surplus.
- Recalibrating priority is concrete, not merely emotional.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God currently get first in your week, your wallet, your attention?
- Where have you been giving God the cheap option?
- What is one specific way to give God your first and best?

Question 7

Student Question:

What is the significance of the place God chose, the threshing floor of Ornan, becoming the altar where judgment was stayed and later the site of the temple itself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The location is not incidental. The threshing floor of Ornan, where the destroying angel's hand was stayed and David built an altar, becomes the site David designates for the house of the Lord (1 Chronicles 22:1). The very ground where judgment was halted by sacrifice becomes the ground of ongoing worship.

Threshing floors were where grain was separated from chaff, a place of both harvest and judgment. On this floor, judgment met mercy: the plague stopped, the altar rose, atonement was made. God chose to plant His house on the spot where wrath was turned aside by sacrifice.

For the Chronicler's first readers, rebuilding worship after exile, this rooting of the temple in a story of mercy was profound comfort. The house of God stood on ground marked by forgiveness, not by human achievement.

We may carefully point forward here. Without reading the New Testament back into David, we can say that the pattern, judgment turned aside by an appointed sacrifice at a place God Himself chose, finds its fullness in Christ, where God's justice and mercy finally meet (Romans 3:25–26). The threshing floor whispers what Calvary declares.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God chose the temple site at the place where mercy halted judgment.
- Threshing floors signify both harvest and judgment.
- Worship is rooted in atonement, not human achievement.
- The pattern anticipates Christ without anachronism (Romans 3:25–26).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the temple stood where mercy stopped judgment?
- How does this scene foreshadow the meeting of justice and mercy in Christ?
- What comfort would this have given exiles rebuilding worship?

Question 8

Student Question:

What unfinished, God-honoring work could you begin preparing for now, even gladly, that others may one day complete after you, as David prepared the temple for Solomon?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David could not build the temple, yet he refused to be sidelined by his limits. He gathered iron, bronze, cedar, and gold in abundance, and charged Solomon to build (1 Chronicles 22:2–5). He invested his final years in a work he would never see completed.

This is the posture of a forgiven man: not paralyzed by his past failure, not idle because the headline role belongs to another, but laboring with all his strength for the worship of God in a generation beyond his own.

Many believers do their most lasting work in preparation, planting trees whose shade they will never sit in: raising children in the faith, teaching young Christians, building up a congregation, supporting works that will outlive them.

Press students to think generationally. What God-honoring work could they begin now, gladly, that others will finish? Faithfulness is often measured in foundations laid, not ribbons cut.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Limitations do not excuse us from kingdom labor.
- Forgiven people serve from gratitude, not paralysis.
- Much faithful work is preparation others will complete.
- Generational thinking marks mature discipleship.

Discussion Prompts

- What lasting work could you begin that others may finish?
- How does forgiveness free us to serve rather than hide?

- Where are you tempted to do nothing because you cannot do everything?

Question 9

Student Question:

Bring together what this passage teaches about sin, personal accountability, God's discipline, and His mercy: how does the threshing floor, where the destroying angel was halted and an altar of atonement was built on the very ground where the temple and its sacrifices would stand, help us understand a God who is both perfectly just and rich in mercy, and how does this anticipate the place where God's justice and mercy would finally meet in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the threads. Sin is real and serious; David sinned greatly. Accountability is personal; he owned it without blaming the tempter (Ezekiel 18:20). Discipline is real; consequences fell, for our God is a God who corrects the children He loves (Hebrews 12:5–11). And mercy is real; the angel's sword was stayed, an altar was built, atonement was made. All four truths stand together in one passage.

The threshing floor is the place where these meet. Justice required a price; mercy provided the altar where that price could be paid. God did not wave sin away as if it did not matter, and He did not destroy the sinner He loved. He provided a sacrifice at a place He chose, and there judgment was turned aside.

This guards us against two errors. The first softens sin until grace becomes cheap and discipline disappears. The second magnifies sin until mercy seems impossible and the sinner despairs. Chronicles holds the line: a God perfectly just and abundantly merciful, both at once, on the same ground.

Now point forward with care. The same God who appointed an altar on Ornan's floor would, in the fullness of time, appoint His Son as the once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26–28). At the cross, God remained just and became the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25–26). The threshing floor is not the cross, but it is a true and Spirit-given picture of how God could be just and merciful together, a picture finally filled out in Christ.

Let the weight of this land. We are accountable; we have sinned; God disciplines; and God, at terrible cost to Himself, has made a way for justice and mercy to embrace. That is the gospel the threshing floor foreshadows and the cross fulfills.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin is real and personally accountable (Ezekiel 18:20), against inherited guilt or fatalism.
- God's discipline is the loving correction of a Father (Hebrews 12:5–11).
- Mercy is provided through an appointed sacrifice, not by ignoring sin.

- God is both perfectly just and richly merciful, held together at the threshing floor.
- The pattern points forward to Christ, where justice and mercy meet (Romans 3:25–26; Hebrews 9:26–28).
- Guard against both cheapening grace and despairing of mercy.

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage keep God's justice and mercy from canceling each other?
- Why must we hold both personal accountability and divine mercy together?
- How does the threshing floor deepen your understanding of what Christ accomplished?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across these two chapters, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through David's failure, confession, and costly worship, and what is the next step of obedience He is calling you to take?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks the student to move from David's story to their own surrender. Across these chapters we have seen failure named honestly, worship offered at real cost, and a forgiven man pouring out his last years for the house of God.

Invite each person to name one specific thing: a sin to confess without excuse, a costly offering to make, a leftover habit to abandon, or a preparatory work to begin for the next generation.

The aim is transformation, not information. A class can discuss the threshing floor brilliantly and remain unchanged. Press gently for one concrete next step of obedience.

Close by anchoring it in Christ. The God who spared David and pointed His people to an altar of mercy has given us His Son. Our response is honest repentance and costly, joyful devotion in His church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Transformation requires a specific, named response.
- Honest confession and costly worship flow from grace received.
- Discipleship is generational and forward-looking.
- Christ is the fulfillment toward which the whole passage leans.

Discussion Prompts

- What one step of obedience is Jesus calling you to take from this lesson?
- Is there a sin you need to own today without any excuse?

- What costly act of worship will you offer this week?