

Rejoice that your names are written in heaven!

This past week we had to fill out our census forms for 2021. Why fill out a census? According to the Bureau of Statistics website, "The Census is a snapshot of who we are and tells the story of how we are changing. Census data is used to inform important decisions about transport, schools, health care, infrastructure and business. It also helps plan local services for individuals, families and communities... The Census provides data on important topics such as populations, rents, mortgages, incomes, religion, languages, housing and more. It helps governments, businesses, researchers, not for profit and community organisations make informed decisions." I guess it's important. But what if I don't want to fill it out? Again, from the Bureau of Statistics, "Under the Census and Statistics Act 1905, the Australian Statistician can issue you a Notice of Direction, which directs you in writing to complete the Census. The notice explains that if you don't complete the Census, you can be prosecuted and fined up to \$222 a day." That's a lot of money!

In the Bible, there are two "censuses" that stand out. One in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, King David called for a census. His census is recorded in two places; 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. In 2 Samuel, God is the acting agent who incites King David to call for the numbering of all able soldiers in the nation. In 1 Chronicles, Satan is the one who incites King David to number Israel. Why the different agents? It makes the most sense that God allowed Satan to stir up David to call for the census. Similarly, God allowed Satan to test Job. So also, Satan asked God to sift the disciple Peter like wheat during Jesus' Last Supper.

In any case, King David called for the census. David also did not levy a tax on the people to pay for the census as is instructed in Exodus 30:12. It states, "*When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them.*" The tax would be a ransom to protect the people from a plague. Ultimately, Jesus would be the ransom who would protect the people. David's desire to count the people seemed to rise from a spirit of pride. The census took 9 months and 20 days to complete. When the census was completed, 2 Samuel 24:10 states, "*David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done.'*"

The next day, the LORD, speaking through His prophet Gad, gave David 3 options to choose from as a consequence of his sin. He could choose between 3 years of famine, 3 months of fleeing for his enemies, or 3 days of plague in the land. David said, "*Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great, but do not let me fall into the hands of men*" (2 Samuel 24:14).

So, the LORD sent a plague upon Israel and 70,000 people died. Death reigned for three days. One thousand years later, there would be a 3-day reign of death that would end in the resurrection!

From this tragedy of death, the LORD told David to raise up an altar to the LORD. David ended up purchasing the land upon which the altar was built. And it was in this location that the future Temple would be built and raised up. Out of pride, tragedy, and repentance, this place would become THE place for the Jews to receive God's mercy and forgiveness. And finally, in the same location, at the place of the cross, the world would receive God's mercy and forgiveness!

While Satan provoked David's census through pride, there was another famous census provoked by simple greed. In the New Testament, the Roman King, Caesar Augustus, called for a census. His primary intent was to track the numbers so he could tax the people. This census is perhaps the most famous because it is remembered and read every Christmas Season. Luke 2:1, states, "*In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.*" Caesar Augustus was motivated by money, but God was motivated by mercy. God counted the time and place in Bethlehem to mark the moment He became incarnate in the flesh. God used this gathering of the people to gather the holy couple together. They were at the right place at the right time so that the Saviour of the world would be born to spark salvation for all.

It IS important to be counted! Yes, let's fill out our nation's census, but there is a much more important place to be counted together.

Jesus counted out 72 disciples and sent them out before He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He would ride His way to the Temple which sat upon the land which David purchased and where he repented. Before Jesus entered Jerusalem, His disciples returned to Him with joy and declared, "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.*"

Jesus replied, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”* He continued, *“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:18-20)*

Ultimately, to be recorded and written down in heaven, this is the most important place to be counted!

Today, we must give thanks to God, for Jesus has been written upon our hearts. And because of this, our names have been written in heaven’s Book of Life.

Who else might God lay upon our hearts – that they may hear, and their names will also be counted and recorded?

“The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out their name from the book of life, but will acknowledge their name before My Father and His angels. The one who has an ear, let them hear”
(Revelation 3:5).