

Did God or Satan Do It?

A visitor to our website read the article [ö2 Samuel 24:1 vs 1 Chronicles 21:1ö](#) that was written by Sid Dosh in April 1999 and emailed the following questions to me:

I don't really understand the contradiction of 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1. Which of the 3 possible explanations on your site is it? Can this disprove the Bible? Is there a clear explanation as to why one says that God moved David and the other says satan?

The two books describe the same event, so let's begin by reading them from several English translations.

Version	2 Samuel 24:1	1 Chronicles 21:1
KJV ¹	And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, öGo, number Israel and Judah.ö	And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.
ASV ²	And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, saying, öGo, number Israel and Judah.ö	And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.
DRA ³	And the anger of the Lord was again kindled against Israel, and stirred up David among them, saying: Go, number Israel and Judah.	And Satan rose up against Israel: and moved David to number Israel.
JUB ⁴	And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them to say, öGo, number Israel and Judah.ö	And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.
TAN ⁵	The anger of the LORD again flared up against Israel; and He incited David against them, saying, öGo and number Israel and Judah.ö	Satan arose against Israel and incited David to number Israel.

It is important to understand the options translators have when they work with ancient Hebrew or Greek manuscripts. They can and do all of the following:

- (1) **translate** ö determine the closest equivalent English meanings for the ancient word.
- (2) **transliterate** ö determine the closest equivalent English letters of the ancient word.
- (3) **euphemisms** ö use an English euphemism for an ancient word or phrase that might be offensive to readers of the translation.
- (4) **omit** ö ignore an ancient word in the ancient manuscript.
- (5) **insert** ö insert an English word in their translation that has no equivalent in the ancient manuscript.

You will find examples of all of the above options in every English translation. Usually, readers are not aware of the choices they made. Below are the two Hebrew words the translators read:

Verse	Hebrew Word	Translators
2 Samuel	יהוה	(1) Translate the word as <i>öthe LORDö</i> or <i>öthe Lordö</i> . (2) Transliterate the word as <i>öJehovahö</i> .
1 Chronicles	שטן	Transliterated the word as <i>öSatan.ö</i>

The Hebrew word in 2 Samuel is the name of the deity, which is known as the *tetragrammaton*. It refers to the four Hebrew letters usually transliterated YHWH by translators. Four of the above translators choose to use *euphemisms* in their translations *ö öthe LORDö* and *öthe Lordö* *ö* to avoid pronouncing the prohibited name or taking the name of the deity in vain. The other translator transliterated it *öJehovah.ö* in order to more accurately reveal what is in the actual Hebrew text. The point is that the Hebrew text has the name of the deity in it.

Each of the above translators chose to **transliterate the Hebrew word** in 1 Chronicles, which is very interesting in the case of the Jewish translation (TAN). The Hebrew word is a very familiar word that is translated *ö adversary* or *opponent*.⁶ When the word has a definite article (*ötheö*) with it the translations are *ö the adversary* or *the opponent* *ö* which usually refer to an office or position (*öthe adversaryö* as one of the *ösons of Godö*⁷) or a court official (*öthe prosecutorö*⁸). It is important to understand that Judaism is not a dualistic religion which means there is no cosmic battle going on between God and Satan. In Judaism all heavenly creatures are under God's control and command. As Sid wrote in the article:

The verses in question are a part of the Hebrew Scriptures (Christianity calls them the Old Testament) and must be viewed in light of Hebraic concepts. Thus the concept of Satan as presented in the New Testament cannot be carried backward and imposed upon the Hebrew Scriptures. From a Hebrew perspective there is no independent supernatural power, co-equal with God. To the Hebrew, God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

The ancient Hebrew manuscripts that we have today are the product of a number of major revisions by the scribes at different periods of time. The earliest group was headed by Ezra, the Priest-Scribe during the Babylonian captivity around 450 BCE. Sid referred to Ezra in his article. Another group of Jewish scribes is called the *masoretes*. They did extensive work on the Hebrew text for several centuries. Among the many changes they made to the Hebrew text was *öguard* the name of YHVHö by not placing it next to something they found offensive. This may be a reason they would have chosen to use SATAN instead of YHVH in Chronicles. I would translate the verse like this:

An adversary arose against Israel and incited David to number Israel.

Interestingly, after David took the census he went to God and said that doing it was a sin. The text does not reveal why it was a sin, however. But God agreed with him and gave him three options for the punishment he would receive:

(1) *three years of famine*

(2) *three months of being destroyed by his foes*

(3) *three days of destruction by the angel of the Lord throughout all the coasts of Israel*⁹

David chose option number three and 70,000 Israelites men were killed.¹⁰

One final comment about your question -- *Can this disprove the Bible?* I think this is what you really mean ó *Can this disprove beliefs about the Bible?* Proving or disproving beliefs about anyone's Bible isn't our mission or goal. Our goal is to provide as accurate information as possible about what the words of the ancient Hebrew and Greek words meant to their authors and the scribes that copied and recopied them. We believe that if Bible readers have the options of protecting their beliefs or accurately understanding the words of their Bible ó *they will choose accurately understanding the words of their Bibles.*

Thanks for the email.

Jim Myers

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¹ King James Version

² American Standard Version

³ Douay-Rheims Version

⁴ Jubilee Bible 2000

⁵ Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures

⁶ *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Volume 3* by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner © 1996 by E. J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands; p. 1316b.

⁷ Job 1:6-9, 13; 2:1-6, 6.

⁸ Zechariah 3:1

⁹ 1 Chronicles 21:12

¹⁰ 1 Chronicles 21:14