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Some Trust in Chariots

960-B

Series: God's Living Legends - Part 2

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Let's begin this lesson just a bit differently. Let's take a current events poll. It involves just one question, and all I want you to do is choose ONE of the six options as an answer. The question is: What nation do you believe is the most powerful nation in the world today?

Check one:

- Russia
- Red China
- The British Empire
- Iran
- The United States
- None of the above

I believe the correct answer is the last one. None of the above. *For I believe without reservation that the most powerful nation in the world today is Israel—tiny, insignificant, little Israel.* Geographically, it is but a dot on the map of the world. It would fit conveniently into an unnoticed corner of the great superpowers and never even be seen. In terms of numerical strength, it is a drop in the bucket. It represents mere grains of sand on the desert floor compared to the millions who are concentrated in the power centers of the world. Economically, it is nothing. It must depend on friendly nations (of which there are few) for much of its natural resources, and were it left to exist on its own raw materials, it would perish in no time. From man's perspective, it is a useless pawn in the game of life, a tiny thorn in the side of the world, a self-centered baby clawing for the world's attention.

Yet, when Israel moves, the world shudders. When Israel speaks, the world listens. When Israel makes war, the world has come to expect to see cunning, quickness, intelligence, and ultimately victory. From the standpoint of what man construes to represent power, Israel is nothing. Yet in reality, it represents the most formidable force in the world. Why?

The answer can be spelled out in simple terms. G-o-d.

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Even though today their eyes are blinded to the source of their power, God, in eternity past, chose out tiny little Israel as a vessel through which to reveal His power and His will to the nations. For a season, they were set aside. But today, they are back in the land, and very much back in the thick of the course of human events; and the course of human events is headed towards its eventual incredible conclusion in the tiny little nation of Israel.

The next question is a natural one. Why would God choose a small, insignificant, seemingly helpless, hated nation to use as a magnifying glass to showcase His strength to the world? Why not raise up a superpower? Why not build a modern Roman Empire with all its majesty and might? Why does God use weakness to demonstrate HIS strength?

The answer to these and other questions about the ways of God await our investigation as we reopen the final chapters of the Living Legend of David and, in particular, take a look at David's sinful census, described in II Samuel 24 and in I Chronicles 21. Our title is "Some Trust in Chariots".

When we last left King David, we had looked on in amazement at a trilogy of events that demonstrated for us three basic spiritual truths, not the least of which was that God has not called the Christian into early retirement. Even down to the day of our Homegoing, the Giants Still Fall. God's plan for God's child is for God's power to be increasingly evident, in particular in those latter years when the physical power has waned, and we cannot, in effect, so easily get in God's way.

There is one incident in David's life, however, that still must be investigated, and it places a huge exclamation mark by that very principle. We find it drawn out for us colorfully by the pen of the Holy Spirit in II Samuel, chapter twenty-four. Let's look at the scene that unfolds there, as God portrays a most unusual choice at the hands of our most unusual king that leads to most unusual consequences.

Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."

So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people."
(II Samuel 24:1,2 NKJV)

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THE SCENE

Now on the surface, it would appear that God moved David to sin. We know, however, that cannot be. James 1:13 makes that clear. It says this,

...for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (NKJV)

The Scripture never contradicts itself, so God did not tempt or move David to sin. I Chronicles 21:1 gives us the answer. Remember: if a passage appears to contradict the Mind of God, seek illumination from the rest of Scripture. Scripture always vindicates itself by explaining itself. This case is no exception.

Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. (I Chronicles 21:1 NKJV)

So the scenario, as carefully described in Job, chapter one, goes like this: Satan stands up to accuse the brethren. He approaches God, or as in the case of Job, God approaches him, and the end result is that Satan challenges the authenticity of the faith of one of God's children and seeks permission from God to hassle that saint. His desire is to discredit God and discourage the saints. God, however, has higher ways. He knows what it is He is striving to do in the saints and through the saints, so He will often grant Satan permission to test us, knowing that though Satan means it for evil, God means it for good. His higher purposes stand to be furthered by Satan's apparently destructive schemes.

This is the case here. It was Satan who tempted David to number Israel. It was God who allowed it, because God was angry at Israel, and He knew the impending judgment was needed to discipline His nation and get their attention.

Enter our old friend Joab. What an enigma this guy has been. All through the story of David's life, Joab has appeared again and again and again. He is a military genius. He is a politician par excellence. He is at times ruthless, vicious, and self-serving; yet at other times he appears to have more spiritual insight and wisdom than David himself. Such is the case here where we read of Joab's unusual response.

And Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing? (II Samuel 24:3 NKJV)

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This one verse is the key to this entire lesson. Read it carefully, and listen carefully to what is written between the lines. It demonstrates the cause of the census, and thus prepares us for the consequences of the census.

Here are the facts we see emerge:

1- Joab objected to the census. In verse 4 we learn that David's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the host. In other words, he had called a summit conference of his cabinet to invoke this edict, and the response of all his men was less than favorable. The vote was unanimous, "Don't do it, David!" Now we all know that David had the authority to overrule their objections. The issue wasn't his *authority*. The issue was his *sensitivity*. Joab had some healthy reasoning. David was not about to listen. The principle is: God uses those he places *under* you as checks and balances to keep you from making mistakes. Don't let your power go to your head. If all those you command, commend you to caution, slow down. It is usually the flesh that refuses to listen to their voice.

2- Joab pleaded, using as his defense the sovereignty of God.

And Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are,

(II Samuel 24:3a NKJV)

"David," Joab begged, "How many people we have is God's business, and if He chooses, He can multiply it a hundredfold." The dramatic inference was, "David, this census is not only not necessary, it is not right. Please don't do it."

3- Joab implied that what David was looking for was larger numbers.

May the LORD make His people a hundred times more than they are.

(I Chronicles 24:3a NKJV)

"David, not only can God increase His flock a hundredfold if He chooses, I hope you live to see it, old boy." In other words, it must have been on David's heart to live to see a kingdom so monstrous, the nations roundabout would cringe at the name of Israel.

4- Joab then accused David of delighting in numbers.

"but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?"

(II Samuel 3b KJV)

The word "delight" used here is a word used all through the

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Old Testament to indicate something done that gives one great pleasure. One of the most noted Old Testament commentators quotes it this way: “If thou hast delight in the greatness of the numbers of the people, David, then why?” Joab accused David of having a secret desire to delight in the numerical strength that now was at his disposal.

5- Once Joab had humbly appealed to the authority over him and been refused, he nonetheless obeyed that authority, leaving the results to God. For the most part, this had been true all his life, his had been the role of the executor of David’s wishes, including David’s mistakes. With one or two noted exceptions, he simply obeyed, leaving the results to God. That’s a difficult truth to learn; and an even MORE difficult truth to obey. But obey he did.

Nevertheless the king’s word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army. Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel. (II Samuel 24:4 NKJV)

(Verses 5-7 describe the process)

So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king. And there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men. (II Samuel 24:8,9 NKJV)

Using the figures given in II Samuel, the numbers of the valiant men, the men according to the census that were capable of bravery in battle, David had one million, three hundred thousand troops ready to defend the name of Israel and defy any intruders and deny any uprising. The numbers in I Chronicles were even higher, listing all those who drew the sword, apparently those of age to be sent onto the battlefield, trained or not. Using either figure, David now had a computerized updated register of his armed forces, and it was impressive indeed. Let’s see just how impressed David was.

THE SORROW

And David’s heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

(II Samuel 24:10 NKJV)

It would appear to any casual observer that this project did

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not yield the results anticipated. David, who *delighted* to know just how strong his army was, now is doubled over with a broken heart once the project is completed. One characteristic of this great man is his ability to repent once he realized he was wrong. Once again, we see his sensitive spirit as he perceives, though a bit late, that what he had done was a sin against God. David is filled with sorrow. He is overcome with grief. His heart is broken because God's heart is broken.

Sorrow is a funny thing where spiritual issues are concerned. Satan has contrived in this age in which we live to take the issue of emotions and stretch it to two opposite extremes. To some, the mere act of feeling sorry constitutes repentance. To others, any emotional response demonstrates a loss of self-control. But God's man or woman finds true repentance in the middle of that cycle. There is genuine grief over the transgression, but that genuine grief is followed, not by buckets of tears and then a return to the sin, *but by a genuine series of steps that lead the believer to forsake the sin and accept the consequences of the sin.* David understood genuine repentance. He was grieved over what he had done. No doubt he wept. Then he turned and faced God head-on, ready to forsake the attitude that caused it, and willing to face the consequences that followed it. David understood, remember, that being sorry didn't negate the consequences. This was another case in point.

The Word of God now offers David a series of choices. God in His mercy, has prepared three alternatives. To the casual observer, none of the three holds much promise. But God, you remember, *was angry with Israel.* They had defiled Him and followed Absalom, and they had defiled Him and followed after Sheba. No real punishment had followed. Now Satan had tempted David, and David's response to that temptation freed God to discipline His people. The punishment belonged to the nation. The choice belonged to David. And what a choice it was.

Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

Go and tell David, "Thus says the LORD: 'I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you.'"

So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now

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consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me.”
(II Samuel 24:11-13 NKJV)

God sent His Word through His prophet and gave David three choices. The first was seven years of famine. Watching the crops dry up, the heavens dry up, and the people starve to death for seven long years. That was alternative number one.

The second alternative was to fall into the hands of their enemies for three months. For 90 days they would flee while those nations roundabout used the Israeli infantry for target practice. The third choice was three days of pestilence; seventy-two hours in which an incurable disease or an unstoppable plague would stretch its ugly claw across the land and leave in its wake thousands of people crippled or dead. Those were David's three choices.

Notice one thing before we go on. *All three choices were aimed at decreasing the numbers or the strength of the people that David had so proudly counted.* In other words, no matter which of the three choices David took, his census was null and void. The strength of his people and the numbers of his people would be almost instantly depleted. So much for David's delight in his one million three hundred thousand warriors. They were God's men, with God's strength, and just as the "Lord giveth; so the Lord taketh away."

The choice seemed to be a simple one for David. After all, the first choice would go on for seven years. It would be a slow, agonizing torture, and David himself might not live to see the end of it. The second choice was not at all appealing to David, because it placed him at the mercy of his enemies, rather than in the hands of God. So David opted for choice number three. Verse 14 explains:

And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."
(II Samuel 24:14 NKJV)

There is no other place to go when the hand of discipline descends upon your life than to throw yourself on the mercy of God in absolute trust that whatever He does is just. David also knew that though God could well bring about as much punishment in three days as he could in three years, then it would be over; and the sooner they entered the rebuilding phase, the better. David chose to place himself into the hands of God because His mercies are great. Indeed they are.

So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till

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the appointed time. From Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men of the people died.

And when the angel stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."

And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded. (II Samuel 24:15-19 NKJV)

When you are in the midst of divine discipline, there is one thing that ought to captivate your thinking. Worship. You belong to a God whose love for you stretches beyond the reaches of your imagination. He has reminded us again and again in Scripture that His punishment is proof of His love. So when the storm clouds gather over you, and you sense that God has allowed life's circumstances to encircle you, that is not the time to pout and hide and resist His love. Worship! Build an altar in your heart and worship. That is what He wanted from Job, and that is what He wanted from David, and that is what He wants from us. In the midst of the thunder, praise Him for the Thunder of His Power. In the midst of the downpour, praise Him for the Rainbow that lies just beyond the horizon. In the midst of the lightning, praise Him that even the Lightning brightens the sky enough to remind you of His presence. Worship Him for His power. Worship Him for His faithfulness. Worship Him for His justice. Then worship Him for His mercy. Because of His great mercy, *never* does His hand of judgment stretch itself to its limits. *Always* in love, as we fall before Him in humility, He stays the hand of the angel from whose storehouse of discipline there has come those parcels of pressure to gain our attention, and bring us to our knees. Discipline demands worship. Worship releases mercy. Mercy dissolves bitterness, and replaces it with love.

David made no effort to defend himself before God. Rather, he

pleaded in defense of his sheep. What a beautiful foretaste of the humility the Good Shepherd would one day demonstrate as He laid down His life for His sheep, as “He who knew no sin, became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (II Corinthians 5:21)”. David built an altar there and worshipped. God poured out His mercy, and the plague was stayed from Israel. In our next study we will learn more about the place and the purpose of that threshing floor and that altar.

THE SIN

For now, however, the basic issue we have to face is just what it was that David did that so caused the judgment of God to fall upon the nation. Was the act of taking a census itself a sin? If so, what about Moses? Was it the way he took it? If so, what did he do wrong? Or was it the attitude with which he took it? And if so, what can we learn about how that attitude is manifested in twentieth-century Christianity?

Theologians abound with arguments that justify God’s anger and point the finger of guilt in David’s direction. Some argue that the issue at hand was one of *a violation of the letter of the law*.

1- Some argue that according to I Chronicles 27:23, David violated the principle of the census in how he handled those twenty years of age and under, and thus it was illegal. This may be true, and it may be an outgrowth of the problem, but it certainly was not the root of the problem.

2- There are those who argue that David did not require the half-shekel, which was to be paid for the service of the sanctuary whenever the people were numbered, as a ransom for their souls, according to Exodus 30:12. Certainly this is a possibility, but even this does not explain verses 2 and 3.

3- There are those who think David intended to exact a tax from the people for his own use, and by numbering the people, he could tell in advance how much tax to expect. The problem with this argument is there is no place in Scripture that even indicates David had a heart to do such a thing, let alone that he did so.

4- There are those who consider it an affront to God’s promise to Abraham that one day his seed would be as innumerable as the dust of the earth, that David by taking a head count, was questioning the validity of that promise. But again, this is sheer conjecture, and there is nothing to substantiate such claims.

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No, I believe there are two basic sins involved that David had to reckon with. And they are two sins that the church today had best reckon with as well. They are these:

Sin 1- God didn't tell David to take a census. Therefore, he had no basis to do so. For everything there is a season under the sun. There were times when God wanted the people numbered for a specific purpose. To do so *then* was an act of obedience. To do so at any other time, without God's clear Word was a direct affront to His will. And just because God gives us the freedom to do a certain thing at a certain time in our lives does not give us the license to patent it and make it a program. David didn't consult God, so God couldn't instruct David. Therefore, this was a gross act of independence on David's part that defied the Lordship of Jehovah in his life.

Sin 2- But the most grievous sin involved was this: David's motive for numbering the people apparently was to delight in their numbers. God hates that.

As we stated at the beginning of the lesson, the issue with God is very simple. He knows that man has a natural bent to trust in his own strength. He knows that man has a natural bent to trust in his own wisdom. He also knows that every time man does that, he is doomed to failure.

David knew that, too. You say, how do I know what David knew? Only because David has so graciously written his heart on paper for us to see and understand. Listen to Psalm 20:

Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

They [who trust in their own strength] have bowed down and fallen; But we [who trust only in God] have risen and stand upright.

Save, LORD! May the King answer us when we call.

(Psalm 20:6-9 NKJV)

Some trust in chariots! Ah, David, that's the problem. Some rest the weight of their expectations on what God has provided rather than on who God is! God may provide a host of chariots, a host of horses, a host of soldiers. Yet, in the multitude of their greatness, if his children put their trust in them, they will undoubtedly fall.

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Some trust in chariots! But chariots cannot save!

Psalm 147 adds this exclamation mark:

He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens that cry.

He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy. (Psalm 147:9-11 NKJV)

We do not know for sure if it was David who penned Psalm 33, but, oh, the words echo forth again the truth the king knew so well. Listen,

The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men.

From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth;

He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.

No king is saved by the multitude of an army; A mighty man is not delivered by great strength.

A horse is a vain hope for safety; Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. (Psalm 33:13-17 NKJV)

Some trust in chariots; some trust in horses. There is no strength in either. Some trust in the multitude of a host...the greatness of their numbers. Neither is there strength in men.

David's great sin was not in taking a census. David's great sin was in why he took a census. He wanted to marvel in the strength of his army. "Look at us, God! What a bargain you got. Send those pagans after us now, God, we're ready for 'em." No you're not, David. The more of you there are, the less likely you are to think you're nothing. And as soon as you begin to marvel in who you are and what you can do, your strength will begin to fail you and when the enemy comes upon you, you will be helpless.

Some trust in chariots, David. But chariots are worthless, David. Pharaoh had chariots, David. They disappeared in the world's biggest car wash when God decided to disassemble them. Some trust in numbers, David. but numbers aren't impressive to God. Ask Gideon. God doesn't need a great army to show Himself strong. God doesn't need anything to show Himself strong. Therefore, the weaker the vessel, the more evident it is where the strength is coming from. That's why God chose Israel, David, remember? Read

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Deuteronomy 7:7.

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; (NKJV)

Did you hear that, David? God chose Israel because they were the most insignificant, least likely to succeed nation on earth. Therefore, when they succeeded there would be no logical explanation, except for God.

Some trust in chariots, David. Not God's people. They will never measure up by the world's standards. He chose them with that in mind. Then what is the sin?

The sin is *glorifying in your own strength or size or number*. Man can't handle that. Therefore, the sin, for the most of us, is even stopping to look at comparisons; and comparisons lead to pride, and pride, the Scripture says, always precedes a fall. You want to fall? Then take a census. Count heads. Put up a sign telling how many you've baptized, or how big your crowds are, or how impressive your budget is; or how effective your ministry is. Just look at yourself, and look at your accomplishments, and set yourself up for a fall.

THE SECRET

The sin is the sin of self-exaltation. The subtlety that leads to it, however, is anything that calls attention to our greatness, rather than to the greatness that belongs to our God.

The secret, you see, is this: *The Glory belongs to God!*

Therefore, anything you or I do to glorify ourselves *or our ministries* is, in effect, stealing glory from God. And God knows that the garments of Glory fit no one but Him.

So I, for one, don't want to hear that your church led the city in baptisms. So what. Who adds to the church? You? Or God? If it's you, they're not real additions. If it's God, then what do you have to boast about?

I don't want to hear that so and so's program is on more stations than any other Christian program, then hear them beg for money to keep it on. If they have to beg for money, they may be on too many stations. I for one, don't want to hear that we or they or anyone else gives more to missions. If God is telling us to, then what have we to glory in? If He isn't, then what are we doing? I don't want to

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hear one more time that such and such is the largest ministry of its kind. So what? Does that make it the most effective? I don't want to see one more ad that says, "Come to the friendliest church in the city." That's a boastful, presumptuous statement that is subjective in nature, and implies that this group or that group has a corner on love. Or how about this: "The church with a heart." You know what's wrong with that? It presupposes that every other church in town has none.

Have you ever read an ad that said, "The smallest ministry of its kind in town" or, "The denomination's slowest growing church!" Or one that states, "We give nothing to missions"? Of course not. Why advertise who *we* are? Or what *we* do? Or what *we* give? We are nobody doing nothing, giving nothing, except it be given to us of God. We have nothing to boast about. The glory belongs to God! Jeremiah 9 says it all.

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich
man glory in his riches;

But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands
and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I
delight," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23,24 NKJV)

You want glory? Glory in Jesus. Not in your methods. You glorify the system and God will cease to use the system. Glory not in your men. You glorify your pastor or your teachers, or your leaders, and God may well remove His mantle of power from their shoulders, lest you place your confidence in men and steal the glory of God. Not in your ministry. How often we hear people boast of their ministries and they swell up with pride as though they had something to do with it. Glory in the methods, the men, or the ministry, and you will but rob God of Glory that belongs only to Him. Well Isaiah quoted God, "I will not give My glory to another."

It's an age-old problem, that's for sure, as old as Satan is. But it's a problem that has intensified itself in our competitive, media-conscious age of enlightenment. I think it's time the body of Christ stopped putting up signs and tooting horns and sending out fund-raising letters saying, "Look at what we've done." I'll tell you what "we've done" when we do; we've *stolen the glory of God*.

David learned a valuable lesson...the hard way. He stopped looking at God just long enough to marvel at how great his kingdom

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was. And the very moment he stopped looking at God, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, he began to put his trust in what people could do for God, rather than what God can do for people. When that happened, all God could do was take from David that which David was glorying in. Mark it, my friend, the principle has not changed.

Some of us trust in chariots. Some of us are forever counting heads and comparing numbers. Instead of singing, “How Great Thou Art”; we’re singing, “How Great We Are.” God says stop it!

Some of the greatest works ever done in the Spirit will, in eternity be revealed to have been done in the shade of anonymity by those who never took roll or applauded their own greatness, or even recognized that they were being mightily used. So consumed with doing the Will of God were they, that to call attention to what they were doing never entered their minds.

What was the greatest nation in the world in David’s day? Israel. What is the greatest nation in the world today? Israel. Because of their strength? God forbid. Because of God’s great strength. Therein rests Israel’s power and therein rests ours.

So, as you go out into the marketplace, don’t go telling men about your church or about your ministry. Don’t tell them about your chariots. Just tell them about your Jesus!

He it is who can save them. He it is who can keep them. He it is who paid the price for their salvation. Therefore, to *Him* belongs *all* the glory!

SOME TRUST IN CHARIOTS

Some trust in chariots
In spite of God’s Word,
They trust their own strength
Instead of the LORD.

They cry to the world,
“Look at what I have done,”
Instead of just worshipping
God’s precious Son.

They count out their works
Or their numbers, and lo
They cry, “Look at me;
God has blessed my life so.”

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Do you see what we do
When we tempt God that way?
“Hey world, look at me,”
Is what they hear us say.

Oh, child, what have we
To boast of or show,
That God has not given
That men might know?

How sad in His Spirit
When God yet doth see,
The plaudits of man
Where His Glory should be.

So trust not in chariots
Nor horses nor men,
Just point men to Jesus,
God’s ransom for sin.

His is the Kingdom
That’s the great story,
And His is the power
So His is the glory.

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