Hebrew sut Greek ἐπέσεισεν provoke / shake up David 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1

In 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, the underlying Hebrew verb translated as "provoke," "incite," or "move" is *sut* (סוּת / *sûṯ*), which the ancient Greek Septuagint (LXX) translates using forms of *episeisō* (ἐπέσεισεν — "he shook up" or "stirred up")*.

These two parallel passages describe the exact same historical event—David ordering a military census—yet they attribute the source of this "stirring up" to two completely different agents: the wrath of Yahweh in Samuel, and *satan* (an adversary) in Chronicles.

Analysing the linguistics of *sut* and *episeisō* reveals how ancient scribes and translators wrestled with divine sovereignty, secondary agency, and the origins of temptation.

1. The Hebrew Verb: *Sut* (סוּת)

In biblical Hebrew, *sut* primarily means **to allure, instigate, incite, or mislead**. It carries a strong connotation of pushing or nudging someone toward a specific course of action, often one that carries heavy consequences.

- **2 Samuel 24:1:** *"Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and* ***he incited*** *[wayyāseṯ] David against them, saying, 'Go, count Israel and Judah.'"*
- **1 Chronicles 21:1:** *"Satan stood up against Israel and* ***incited*** *[wayyāseṯ] David to take a census of Israel."*

The verb does not imply physical force; rather, it suggests an internal or mental prompt, enticement, or persuasion. Strikingly, *sut* is the same verb used in **Job 2:3**, where God tells Satan, *"You* ***incited*** *[wa-tə-sî-ṯê-nî] me against him to ruin him without any reason."* It is also used by David in **1 Samuel 26:19**, when he wonders if an external force is driving Saul's madness: *"If the Lord has* ***incited*** *[hĕsîṯəkā] you against me, let him accept an offering..."*

2. The Greek Translation: *Episeisō* (ἐπέσεισεν)

When the Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the Septuagint), they selected the verb ***episeisō* (ἐπεσείω)** to capture the mechanics of *sut*.

- **Etymology:** The root word is *seiō* (σείω), which means "to shake" or "to cause to tremble" (the root of *seismic*). Adding the prefix *epi-* (upon/against) transforms the meaning into **"to shake up against," "to stir up," or "to instigate a violent motion against."**
- **Textual Variance:** In the standard Greek Septuagint text of **1 Chronicles 21:1**, the translator writes: *"And the Devil stood up against Israel, and* ***stirred up*** *[epéseisen] David..."*
- **The Samuel Anomaly:** Intriguingly, in certain key Septuagint manuscripts (such as the Brenton translation of 2 Samuel 24:1), the Greek text actually imports "Satan" into the Samuel account to smooth over the theological tension, reading: *"And the Lord caused his anger to burn forth again in Israel, and* ***Satan stirred up*** *David against them..."*

3. Reconciling the Action: Primary vs. Secondary Causation

The linguistic pairing of *sut* and *episeisō* highlights how ancient writers understood human psychological vulnerability and divine permission:

Passage	Subject of *Sut* / *Episeisō*	Theological Perspective
2 Samuel 24:1	**The Anger of Yahweh** (or an impersonal "it")	**Ultimate Cause:** Focuses on absolute divine sovereignty. God permits the temptation to happen as a means of judging Israel's prior unfaithfulness.
1 Chronicles 21:1	***Satan* / An Adversary**	**Proximate Cause:** Focuses on the immediate spiritual agent of temptation. In the original Hebrew, *satan* lacks a definite article ("the"), which can mean a generic earthly adversary or prosecuting angel rather than the personified Devil.

By using *sut* (and *episeisō*), the text shows that David was not forced into sin against his will. Instead, his pride was **"shaken up" and enticed**—whether prompted immediately by an adversarial entity or sovereignly permitted by God withdrawing His restraining grace—leaving David fully responsible for choosing to count his military strength instead of relying entirely on God.

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