How Many Horsemen did David Capture? (2 Sam 8:4 & 1 Ch 18:4)

When David defeated the King of Zobah, how many horsemen did he capture?

- (a) One thousand and seven hundred (2 Samuel 8:4)
- (b) Seven thousand (I Chronicles 18:4)

Shabir Ally [1] alleges a "clear contradiction" between these verses:

2 Samuel 8:4
(4)   And David took from him a thousand *chariots*, and **seven hundred horsemen**, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed all the chariot *horses*, but reserved of them *for* an hundred chariots.

1 Chronicles 18:4
(4)   And David took from him a thousand chariots, and **seven thousand horsemen**, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot *horses*, but reserved of them an hundred chariots.

First, I'd like to point out these verses have no instances of 1700 horsemen. As we can see, it clearly states "seven hundred" horsemen. The "thousand" in 2 Samuel 8:4 clearly refers to chariots, as verified in the account in 1 Chronicles.

"**Seventeen hundred horsemen**" would be a contradiction. I don't know what Bible Shabir Ally was using for this question, but since it does make a difference which English translation is used, I will answer from the King James Version, and explain why Samuel numbers "**seven hundred**" when Chronicles numbers "**seven thousand**."

While considering "problems" let's also consider this: David took 1000 chariots, and then he houghed the horses for all but 100 chariots. Does that seem a little strange? Is there a sane reason why he would he take good chariots with their teams if he wasn't going to use them?

I think the obvious answer is that David had no intention of letting the King of Zobah keep his weapons of war! King Zobah was not David's friend. Taking these chariots, including their horses and horsemen and their accompanying footmen, was part of David's disarmament policy.

2 Samuel 8:3
(3)   David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates.

[1], "101 Clear Contradictions in the Bible", Shabir Ally, Al-Attique Int'l Islamic Publications, http://www.islamway.com/english/images/library/contradictions.htm

> **1 Chronicles 18:3**
> (3)   And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates.

Now that David has disarmed king Zobah and taken away his weapons of war, what is he going to do with them? Footmen might be able to be spread among the troops in his own army for his war against the Syrians, or barring that, he could take their weapons and armour away and set them free.

However, the horses and chariots present their own problem. Israel was not supposed to breed warhorses, nor depend on chariots for their military strength. David didn't need that many chariots.

> **Deuteronomy 17:14-16**
> (14) When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that *are* about me;
> (15) Thou shalt in any wise set *him* king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: *one* from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother.
> (16) **But he shall not multiply horses to himself**, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.
>
> **Joshua 11:6-9**
> (6) **And the LORD said unto Joshua**, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: **thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.**
> (7) So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.
> (8) And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.
> (9) And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: **he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.**

What is David going to do with 1000 chariots? It's not only the physical chariots, but each chariot would naturally have its own crew of horses and horsemen. The record tells us that David took 1000 chariots, but he only reserved 100 of them.

> 𝕳𝖔𝖚𝖌𝖍   Although the word **hough** appears only once in the AV, the form **houghed** is found three times. **Hough**, from the Old English *hoh*, "heel," means to disable by cutting the sinew or tendons of the hough, the joint in the hind leg of an animal. Variations of **hough** include *hock, hox, houx, and hoxen*. [2]

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[2] Laurence M. Vance, Archaic Words and the Authorized Version, p 186.

As a matter of note, David is not killing the horses, he is only disabling their ability to run. The horses that David houghed are never going to be used for war again, although they could carry people, or pull plows or carriages.

Using anachronistic paraphrasing, Zobah experienced a hostile takeover, and David, as the corporate raider and their new management, absorbed all of the footman employees, but conducted massive layoffs in the chariot department.

The Euphrates Gazette [3]

Nine out of ten horses have lost their jobs! These horses are now looking for work, and are left on their own to find gainful employment. Will David (who declined to comment) provide job-placement services for them? They may now be left wandering the streets or traveling the highways looking for someone to take them in. Their running days are over, and grass prices are at an all-time high of 20 shekels per barrel! (Article continued on back of tablet.)

Seriously, **however**, David probably had uses for the houghed horses also: they could carry pack burdens or people, and he still had a war to fight. But I hope that this illustrates the point that if **decimating** the amount of chariots puts horses out of work, **what does it do to the human members or the chariot crews**?

New "Contradiction Questions"

Do these verses contradict within themselves concerning the number of chariots?

Q: How many chariots were there (according to 2 Samuel 8:4)**?**
a) 100 chariots   (2 Samuel 8:4)
b) 1000 chariots (2 Samuel 8:4)

A: Both answers are correct. David deprived Hadadezer of 1000 chariots, but he only kept 100 of those chariots (a tenth) for his own use.

Q: How many chariots were there (according to 1 Chronicles 18:4)**?**
c) 100 chariots   (1 Chronicles 18:4)
d) 1000 chariots (1 Chronicles 18:4)

A: Both answers are correct. David deprived Hadadezer of 1000 chariots, but he only kept 100 of those chariots (a tenth) for his own use.

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[3] Most scholars would not recognize "The Euphrates Gazette" as an authentic ancient document due to a lack of evidence supporting its antiquity. Some scholars even suggest that it is a spurious document, or merely an uninspired work of fiction. It is cited here because of its inherent satirical value.

If David's chariot-reduction policy put nine out of ten horses looking for new jobs, then it also makes logical mathematical sense that the same ratio of horsemen from these same chariot crews are going to be cut as well. David kept one chariot out of ten, and it stands to reason that he also kept the horses and the horsemen for these 100 chariots.

So how many horsemen were there per chariot?

If we first consider 2 Samuel 8:4, we are told there were 700 horsemen. If these horsemen are distributed among the original 1000 chariots, that leaves us with a ratio of 0.7 horsemen per chariot. However, if these were the horsemen that stayed with their chariots, we can calculate a more reasonable 7 horsemen per chariot.

If we now look at 1 Chronicles 18:4, we are told there were 7000 horsemen. If these were the horsemen with the original 1000 chariots, we can calculate a ratio of 7 horsemen per chariot. However, this cannot be the amount of horsemen that kept their jobs as horsemen, because 7000 horsemen split among 100 chariots leaves us with the startling figure of 70 horsemen per chariot!

Both of these passages (2 Samuel 8:4 and 1 Chronicles 18:4) lead us to the same conclusion: regardless of how many horses were involved, each chariot employed a seven-man team of horsemen. There was a seven to one (7:1) ratio of horsemen to chariots.

$$\frac{1000 \text{ chariots}}{7000 \text{ horsemen}} \quad = \quad \frac{1 \text{ chariot}}{7 \text{ horsemen}} \quad = \quad \frac{100 \text{ chariots}}{700 \text{ horsemen}}$$

It seems that these passages do not contradict each other. The only way to try to assume a "contradiction" out of these two versions forces one to first assume one of these additional assumptions:

1)   David already had trained horsemen to operate chariots, or
2)   David kept 100 chariots but without horses or horsemen, or
3)   Horsemen, once deprived of their horses, still remain horsemen, or
4)   That chariots operated without their horsemen, or
5)   Each chariot was operated by 70 horsemen, or
6)   Each chariot was operated by 7/10ths of a horseman.

First, there is no previous record of David keeping chariots or horses for war, nor does there seem to have been a previous opportunity for him to do so. Additionally, because God later punished Israel with pestilence for taking a military census (2 Sam 42:10 & 1 Ch 21:8), it is unlikely that either Saul or David had previously started training their own chariot crews without a mention in the books of Samuel or Chronicles.

Second, it was a logical assumption that David would keep enough horses to operate the 100 chariots that he kept, so it is therefore just as logical that David kept the human portion of the chariot crews that were required to drive the chariots and maintain the chariot horses.

Third, the account in Samuel focuses on the chariots that David kept, but the account in Chronicles gives us the exact amount of men that David deprived of Hadadezer. They were horsemen when they left, but when the horsemen no longer had horses they were no longer horsemen.

$$\mathfrak{horsemen} - \mathfrak{horses} = \mathfrak{men}$$

The remaining possibilities of four through six fall under the category of absurd. Chariots do not drive themselves, and no chariot crew is going to contain seventy horsemen, and no chariot can be operated by a fractional part of a horseman.

The only remaining logical conclusion we can reach is that both verses describe the same event accurately. David took seven hundred horsemen to operate the 100 chariots that he reserved (2 Samuel 8:4) and he took the original seven thousand horsemen away from Hadadazer after he conquered him.

We are not told when and where David disbanded the chariot units and houghed the horses, or how long he took to make his selection process. However, thanks to the account in 2 Samuel, we know that David disbanded the chariots teams before the battle in the next verse:

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2 Samuel 8:5
(5)   And when the Syrians of Damascus came to succour Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men.

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Our Final Answer

When David defeated the King of Zobah, how many horsemen did he capture?

(a) One thousand and seven hundred (2 Samuel 8:4)

(b) Seven thousand (I Chronicles 18:4)

David took (kept) seven hundred horsemen from King of Zobah (2 Samuel 8:4). However, Ally Shabir did not ask how many horsemen David took, nor did he ask how many horsemen David kept. He asked "how many horsemen did he *capture*?" So this does not directly answer his specific question.

However, David took (captured) 7000 horsemen from King of Zobah (1 Chronicles 18:4.) The answer to this question, as it is written, is **answer (b)**.

Epilogue: King James Version vs. Modern Versions (2 Sam 8:4)

> **(KJV, 2 Samuel 8:4)**
> (4) And David took from him a thousand *chariots*, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed all the chariot *horses*, but reserved of them *for* an hundred chariots.

The King James Version did not contain an error in this verse, or a contradiction between its parallel verse in 1 Chronicles 18:4. Although the word "chariots" was not actually written in the Hebrew text in this passage, it was implied, and the "thousand" modifies the implied "chariots."

Similarly, when it says that "David houghed all the chariots" it obviously is meant to apply to the horses that powered those chariots. Physical chariots do not have tendons that can be cut, but the teams of horses that pull them do.

The Masoretic Hebrew Text does state that David took "seven hundred horsemen" and the King James translates this accurately. This represents the amount of horsemen that David took *and kept for his reserved chariots*.

Many modern English translations create errors or contradictions in their translation of this verse, which helps to generate confusion: I will cite a few examples below, with explanations.

> **(NIV, 2 Sam 8:4)** David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses.

It seems as if the NIV translators did not understand this verse, and decided that the Hebrew must be mistaken. The "seven hundred horsemen" have been replaced by "seven thousand charioteers."

However, they insert an additional translation error by reserving only a hundred of the chariot horses, where the Hebrew text reserves one hundred chariots. Chariots are usually driven by more than one horse, especially if they are expected to carry armour and weapons at high speed. The NIV has changed the meaning of the text twice in this one verse.

> **(NASB, 2 Sam 8:4)** And David captured from him 1,700 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers; and David hamstrung the chariot horses, but reserved *enough* of them for 100 chariots.

The NASB here makes the mistake of combining the "thousand *chariots*" and the "seven hundred horsemen" together to get "1,700 horsemen." This creates the contradiction noticed by Shabir Ally. The NASB reports 1,700 horsemen and 100

chariots, leaving us with a 17:1 horseman to chariot ratio. It does report 1,000 chariots and 7,000 horsemen in 1 Chronicles, but now this information conflicts with 2 Samuel.

At least the NASB reserved 100 chariots of horses, rather than making the same mistake that the NIV did in keeping only 100 horses.

> **(NLT, 2 Sam 8:4)** David captured seventeen hundred charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldier. Then he crippled all but one hundred of the chariot horses.

The NLT combines all the translation errors of both the NIV and NASB, eliminating the 1000 chariots, adding 1000 charioteers to David's army, and leaving only enough horses for very few chariots. Where is David going to find jobs for 1700 hundred charioteers if he keeps only 100 horses? Is each horse supposed to pull its own chariot, plus 17 men, plus arms and equipment?

Yet it also adds a new twist. Instead of "houghing" the horses, they choose the word "crippled" which makes David sound as if he is cruelly maiming the captured horses. "Houghing" prevented the animal from being used in war – leaving it otherwise intact, and even guaranteed it a more peaceful life than for what it had been previously trained. David did not "cripple" the horses, he "houghed" them.

Appendix: The Masoretic Text and the King James Translation

(4)וַיִּלְכֹּד דָּוִד מִמֶּנּוּ אֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע־מֵאוֹת פָּרָשִׁים וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף אִישׁ רַגְלִי

וַיְעַקֵּר דָּוִד אֶת־כָּל־הָרֶכֶב וַיּוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ מֵאָה רָכֶב:

(4)וַיִּלְכֹּד דָּוִיד מִמֶּנּוּ אֶלֶף רֶכֶב וְשִׁבְעַת אֲלָפִים פָּרָשִׁים וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף

אִישׁ רַגְלִי וַיְעַקֵּר דָּוִיד אֶת־כָּל־הָרֶכֶב וַיּוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ מֵאָה רָכֶב:

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2 Samuel 8:4

(4) And **David** took from him a **thousand** *chariots*, and **seven hundred horsemen**, and **twenty thousand** footmen: and **David** houghed all the **chariot** *horses*, but reserved of them *for* an **hundred chariots.**

1 Chronicles 18:4

(4) And **David** took from him a **thousand chariots**, and **seven thousand horsemen**, and **twenty thousand** footmen: **David** also houghed all the **chariot** *horses*, but reserved of them an **hundred chariots**.

H3967

מֵאיָה   מֵאָה

mê'âh mê'yâh

may-aw', may-yaw'

Probably a primitive numeral; a *hundred*; also as a multiplicative and a fraction: - **hundred** ([-fold], -th), + sixscore.

H505

אֶלֶף

'eleph

eh'-lef

Properly the same as H504; hence (an ox's head being the first letter of the alphabet, and this eventually used as a numeral) a *thousand:* - **thousand**.