

**File No. 66**

**II SAMUEL 24:1–25; I CHRONICLES 22:1**

I Chronicles 21:1–30

**DAVID COUNTS HIS MEN**

(SBS Bk 2 Story No. 52)

*Story Notes*

For the second time in the closing section of II Samuel (21–24), the Lord was angry with Israel. This time, the reason was not important to reveal, but God dealt with it by allowing David to be tempted by Satan (I Chron. 21:1) to number and enrol his troops. Had David forgotten the word of his friend Jonathan that 'nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few' (I Sam. 14:6)? Joab and the other commanders could see this would attract God's anger; there was no need for this action other than to satisfy some private ambition of David's. Their protests were overruled and a massive census was conducted.

The significance of taking a census is suggested by each person having to make an offering for atonement for themselves when they were acknowledged as part of Israel (Exod. 30:12). They were an assembly of forgiven people, not a political force.

David was still just as capable of foolishness as Saul had been (cf. 24:12 with I Sam. 13:13), but he loved God and, after the event, was horrified at what he had done, and sought peace with God. Would the country now fall into another three years of famine (as in 21:1), or three months of defeat, or three days of God's direct judgement. David preferred the anger of God to the anger of man because he had discovered the greatness of God's mercy.

God's anger had been against all Israel and now that judgement fell on men from one end of the country to the other. Only when Jerusalem was about to fall did he call on the angel to stop. At that moment, David saw the angel's poised sword and asked that he alone suffer for the sin he had committed. Here was a shepherd, again, offering himself so that the people could be saved (cf. Exod. 32:32). It was time for the mercy of God, and God sent a prophet to call the grieving David to make an offering. So, from David's own property, an offering was made. For a second time in these closing chapters, the Lord was moved by prayer for the land (24:25 with 21:14).

The account in I Chronicles 22:1 is fuller and includes David's declaration: 'Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.' He knew this was 'the place that the LORD' had chosen 'as a dwelling for his name' (Deut. 12:11), the place where mercy triumphed over judgement (cf. James 2:13).

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