

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

8-4-21

Numbers 1

The Purpose Of The Census - Verses 1-3

¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, ² Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; ³ From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

1:1 As the book of Numbers opens, the Israelites had been camped near Mount Sinai for more than a year. There they had received all the laws and regulations recorded in the book of Leviticus. They had been transformed into a new nation and equipped for their task. At this time, they were ready to move out and receive their land. In preparation, Moses and Aaron were told to number all the men who were able to serve in the army. This book is named for this census, or numbering, of the people.

1:1 The tent of meeting (that is, the tabernacle) was the smaller structure inside the larger tabernacle complex, which also included the surrounding courtyard area. This tent contained the sanctuary (or Holy Place) in one part, and the Most Holy Place with the ark in another part. These two parts were separated by a curtain. God revealed himself to Moses in the Most Holy Place.

Exodus 33:7 mentions a "tent of meeting" as the place where Moses met with God before this primary tabernacle was constructed. Many believe that the "tent of meeting" mentioned in Exodus 33:7 served the same function as the one described here.

1:2-3 Taking a census was long and tedious, but it was an important task. The fighting men had to be counted to determine Israel's military strength before entering the Promised Land. In addition, the tribes had to be organized to determine the amount of land each would need, as well as to provide genealogical records. Without such a census, the task of conquering and organizing the Promised Land would have been more difficult. Whenever we are at a crossroads, it is important to take inventory of our resources. We will serve more effectively if, before plunging in, we set aside time to take a "census" of all we have—possessions, relationships, spiritual condition, time, goals.

The Heads Of The Tribes - Verses 4-16

⁴ And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers. ⁵ And these are the names of the men that shall stand with you: of the tribe of Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur. ⁶ Of Simeon; Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. ⁷ Of Judah; Nahshon the son of Amminadab. ⁸ Of Issachar; Nethaneel the son of Zuar. ⁹ Of

Zebulun; Eliab the son of Helon. ¹⁰ Of the children of Joseph: of Ephraim; Elishama the son of Ammihud: of Manasseh; Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. ¹¹ Of Benjamin; Abidan the son of Gideoni. ¹² Of Dan; Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. ¹³ Of Asher; Pagiel the son of Ocran. ¹⁴ Of Gad; Eliasaph the son of Deuel. ¹⁵ Of Naphtali; Ahira the son of Enan. ¹⁶ These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel.

1:4 A man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house: Israel was organized according to the tribes that descended from the original twelve sons of Jacob (later renamed Israel by God). Each of these twelve tribes designated one who was the head of his father's house, who was to stand with Moses and stand for their whole tribe.

1:5-16 From Reuben ... from Simeon ...: Twelve tribes are mentioned, but not the tribe of Levi. Yet the number twelve is maintained because from Jacob's son Joseph, two tribes came (Ephraim and Manasseh).

The Assembly Of The Leaders - Verses 17-19

¹⁷ And Moses and Aaron took these men which are expressed by their names: ¹⁸ And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls. ¹⁹ As the LORD commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai.

1:17-19 They recited their ancestry by families: The leaders of each tribe was responsible to count the potential soldiers in their tribe, then they gathered to make report to Moses. Each one individually: Every individual was important to God. This wasn't just the assembling of a final number, but a specific mention of each individual.

The Tribe Of Reuben: 46,500 Potential Soldiers - Verses 20-21

²⁰ And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ²¹ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Reuben, were forty and six thousand and five hundred.

1:20-46 If there were 603,550 men, not counting the Levites or women and children, the total population must have numbered more than two million Israelites. How could such a large population grow from Jacob's family of 70 who moved down to Egypt? The book of Exodus tells us that the Israelites who descended from Jacob's family "multiplied greatly" (Exodus 1:7). Because they remained in Egypt more than 400 years, they had plenty of time to grow into a large group of people. After leaving Egypt, they were able to survive in the wilderness because God miraculously provided the food and water they needed. The leaders of Moab were terrified because of the large number of Israelites (22:3).

The Tribe Of Simeon: 59,300 Potential Soldiers - Verses 22-23

²² Of the children of Simeon, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, those that were numbered of them, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ²³ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Simeon, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred.

The Tribe Of Gad: 45,650 Potential Soldiers - Verses 24-25

²⁴ Of the children of Gad, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ²⁵ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Gad, were forty and five thousand six hundred and fifty.

The Tribe Of Judah: 74,600 Potential Soldiers - Verses 26-27

²⁶ Of the children of Judah, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ²⁷ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Judah, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred.

The Tribe Of Issachar: 54,400 Potential Soldiers - Verses 28-29

²⁸ Of the children of Issachar, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ²⁹ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Issachar, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred.

The Tribe Of Zebulun: 57,400 Potential Soldiers - Verses 30-31

³⁰ Of the children of Zebulun, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ³¹ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Zebulun, were fifty and seven thousand and four hundred.

The Tribe Of Ephraim: 40,500 Potential Soldiers - Verses 32-33

³² Of the children of Joseph, namely, of the children of Ephraim, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ³³ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand and five hundred.

The Tribe Of Manasseh: 32,200 Potential Soldiers - Verses 34-35

³⁴ Of the children of Manasseh, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward,

all that were able to go forth to war; ³⁵ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Manasseh, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred.

The Tribe Of Benjamin: 35,400 Potential Soldiers - Verses 36-37

³⁶ Of the children of Benjamin, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ³⁷ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Benjamin, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred.

The Tribe Of Dan: 62,700 Potential Soldiers - Verses 38-39

³⁸ Of the children of Dan, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ³⁹ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Dan, were threescore and two thousand and seven hundred.

The Tribe Of Asher: 41,500 Potential Soldiers - Verses 40-41

⁴⁰ Of the children of Asher, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ⁴¹ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Asher, were forty and one thousand and five hundred.

The Tribe Of Naphtali: 53,400 Potential Soldiers - Verses 42-43

⁴² Of the children of Naphtali, throughout their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; ⁴³ Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Naphtali, were fifty and three thousand and four hundred.

Summary Of The Tribes: 603,550 Potential Soldiers In Israel - Verses 44-46

⁴⁴ These are those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers. ⁴⁵ So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; ⁴⁶ Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.

1:44-46 All who were able to go to war in Israel; all who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty: At the end of the Book of Numbers - 38 years later - this census is repeated. The total number of available soldiers will be almost the same - only a loss of some two thousand. But the numbers of each tribe change significantly, and there is meaning in what happened to each tribe over these critical 38 years.

1:44-46 In this first census Manasseh is the smallest tribe and Judah is the largest. There are two tribes in the 30 thousands; three in the 40 thousands; four in the 50 thousands; one in the

60 thousands, and one in the 70 thousands. Based on having 603,550 available soldiers, many people estimate the total population of Israel at this time to be between two and two-and-a-half million.

The Special Case Of The Tribe Of Levi - Verses 47-54

⁴⁷ But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. ⁴⁸ For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying, ⁴⁹ Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: ⁵⁰ But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. ⁵¹ And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. ⁵² And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. ⁵³ But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. ⁵⁴ And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they.

1:47 But the Levites were not numbered among them: Because this was a census of potential soldiers, the Tribe of Levi was not counted. They alone among the tribes did not go to war because they had special responsibility to God for the priestly duties of Israel.

1:54 Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did: Counting, or taking inventory, is an essential step in organization and moving forward. In preparing to enter the Promised Land Israel had to be organized - God is an organized God, and moves through organization even when we can't figure it out! Therefore it was essential that Israel took inventory and saw where they were.

God counts things. He counts the stars and has a name for each one (Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 40:26). God even counts and knows the number of hairs on your head! (Matthew 10:30). Taking inventory is fine; even a necessary first step in organizing for victory in taking hold of God's promises. But it must always be done understanding that some of the important factors - as the Levites were in Israel - cannot be counted. No inventory is totally complete, and God always works mightily through things that can't be counted.