

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Numbers

Lesson #1, Chapters 1 & 2

Introduction to the Book of Numbers

The first five books of the Bible were written by Moses. These five books in order are a continuing story beginning with the Creation of the world, but focusing on the history of the nation of Israel beginning with God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12. Starting with that chapter, the story of the beginning of this nation continues all the way through the five books of Moses.

The Book of Numbers is so named because of two "numberings" where a census is taken of the Israelites. The English name for this book is "Numbers," but the Hebrew Bible entitles the book, "In the Wilderness," taken from the first verse.

Numbers 1:1 (NLT) A year after Israel's departure from Egypt, the Lord spoke to Moses in the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai...

The Israelites left Egypt and camped at the base of Mt. Sinai as recorded in Exodus 19. They are there all through the rest of Exodus and throughout the book of Leviticus, receiving God's instructions and building the Tabernacle and its furniture. They will continue to camp at Sinai until we get to Numbers 10, when they will sound the trumpets, break camp, and go forth toward the Promised Land.

The Book of Numbers has two major divisions. The first division is chapters 1 through 10:10 and takes place while still at Sinai. In these chapters the Israelites are preparing for the journey, and they are instructed to number the people (in particular, the men - for military registration). Other instructions are given as well. The time period for these chapters is fifty days.

The second division of the book is Numbers 10:11 to the end (chapter 36), and deals with the journey toward the Promised Land. We will read of the complaints, rebellions, and disobedience of the generation that left Egypt - and we will read of their deaths. The next generation is then instructed to prepare to enter the Promised Land - and a new census is taken, this time of those who are left who will enter in. The book ends with the division of the land that they are going to possess.

Probably the most well-known story in the Book of Numbers is the report of the spies. Ten of them gave a negative report, and only two (Joshua and Caleb) gave a positive report. Although God is slow to anger, we see in the Book of Numbers how His people provoked Him to anger by their continual complaining, faithlessness, and disobedience.

The children of Israel left Egypt as slaves. Their "slave mentality" needed some changing before they were ready to enter the Promised Land. Freedom from slavery did not mean freedom from law and order. They had been taught during their year of camping at the base of Mt. Sinai that they had to submit to God's laws and His ways. The wilderness was not their destination. It was intended to be

something that they would pass through to get to their destination. However, God was not going to allow them to enter the Promised Land until they were ready, and they were going to have to stay in the wilderness until they were.

Numbers Chapter 1

Registration of Israel's Troops

Numbers 1:1 (NLT) A year after Israel's departure from Egypt, the Lord spoke to Moses in the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai.

The Book of Numbers is all about God's people "in the wilderness," beginning at the base of Mt. Sinai and continuing with their wanderings after they were not permitted to enter the Promised Land on their first attempt.

On the first day of the second month of that year he said, ²"From the whole community of Israel, record the names of all the warriors by their clans and families. List all the men ³twenty years old or older who are able to go to war. You and Aaron must register the troops, ⁴ and you will be assisted by one family leader from each tribe.

⁵"These are the tribes and the names of the leaders who will assist you:

Tribe Leader

Reuben

Elizur son of Shedeur

⁶ Simeon

Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai

⁷ Judah

Nahshon son of Amminadab

⁸ Issachar

Nethanel son of Zuar

⁹ Zebulun

Eliab son of Helon

¹⁰ Ephraim son of Joseph

Elishama son of Ammihud

Manasseh son of Joseph

Gamaliel son of Pedahzur

¹¹ Benjamin

Abidan son of Gideoni

¹² Dan

Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai

¹³ Asher

Pagiel son of Ocran

¹⁴ Gad

Eliasaph son of Deuel

¹⁵ Naphtali

Ahira son of Enan

¹⁶ These are the chosen leaders of the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the clans of Israel."

¹⁷ So Moses and Aaron called together these chosen leaders, ¹⁸ and they assembled the whole community of Israel on that very day. All the people were registered according to their ancestry by their clans and families. The men of Israel who were twenty years old or older were listed one by one, ¹⁹ just as the Lord had commanded Moses. So Moses recorded their names in the wilderness of Sinai.

20-21 This is the number of men twenty years old or older who were able to go to war, as their names were listed in the records of their clans and families:

Tribe Number

Reuben (Jacob's oldest son)

46,500

22-23 Simeon

59,300

24-25 Gad

45,650

26-27 Judah

74,600

28-29 Issachar

54,400

30-31 Zebulun

57,400

32-33 Ephraim son of Joseph

40,500

34-35 Manasseh son of Joseph

32,200

36-37 Benjamin

35,400

38-39 Dan

62,700

40-41 Asher

41,500

42-43 Naphtali

53,400

⁴⁴ These were the men registered by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, all listed according to their ancestral descent. ⁴⁵ They were registered by families—all the men of Israel who were twenty years old or older and able to go to war. ⁴⁶ The total number was 603,550.

⁴⁷ But this total did not include the Levites. ⁴⁸ For the Lord had said to Moses, ⁴⁹ "Do not include the tribe of Levi in the registration; do not count them with the rest of the Israelites. ⁵⁰ Put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle of the Covenant, along with all its furnishings and equipment. They must carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings as you travel, and they must take care of it and camp around it. ⁵¹ Whenever it is time for the Tabernacle to move, the Levites will take it down. And when it is time to stop, they will set it up again. But any unauthorized person who goes too near the Tabernacle must be put to death. ⁵² Each tribe of Israel will camp in a designated area with its own family banner. ⁵³ But the Levites will camp around the Tabernacle of the Covenant to protect the community of Israel from the Lord's anger. The Levites are responsible to stand guard around the Tabernacle."

⁵⁴ So the Israelites did everything just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The Lord commanded that a census be taken of the children of Israel. The reason for this is to determine the number of men who were eligible for service in Israel's military. The women and children were not included in the census because they were not eligible for military service. This census shows us the large number of people that God delivered from Egypt - and we marvel that God was able to direct and care for such a large group of people.

Census Taking in the Bible

God gave instruction about census taking in Exodus:

Exodus 30:11 (NLT) Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹² “Whenever you take a census of the people of Israel, each man who is counted must pay a ransom for himself to the Lord. Then no plague will strike the people as you count them. ¹³ Each person who is counted must give a small piece of silver as a sacred offering to the Lord. (This payment is half a shekel, based on the sanctuary shekel, which equals twenty gerahs.) ¹⁴ All who have reached their twentieth birthday must give this sacred offering to the Lord. ¹⁵ When this offering is given to the Lord to purify your lives, making you right with him, the rich must not give more than the specified amount, and the poor must not give less. ¹⁶ Receive this ransom money [atonement money] from the Israelites, and use it for the care of the Tabernacle. It will bring the Israelites to the Lord’s attention, and it will purify [make atonement for] your lives.”

Doing the math, determining the weight of silver in a half shekel and multiplying by the number of people recorded, we come up with about 3 3/4 tons of silver that was given in Exodus 30. In Exodus 38, we are told:

Exodus 38:25 (NLT) The whole community of Israel gave 7,545 pounds of silver, as measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel. ²⁶ This silver came from the tax collected from each man registered in the census . . . The tax was collected from 603,550 men who had reached their twentieth birthday. ²⁷ The hundred bases for the frames of the sanctuary walls and for the posts supporting the inner curtain required 7,500 pounds of silver, about 75 pounds for each base. ²⁸ The remaining 45 pounds of silver was used to make the hooks and rings and to overlay the tops of the posts.

The ransom money (or atonement money) that was collected from the census was used for the Tabernacle, in particular for the silver bases to hold up the frames for the sanctuary walls and the posts for the veil leading to the presence of God.

Paying the ransom in Exodus 30 was a way to say that these people were God’s people, and to acknowledge that God was the one who held their lives in His hand. This stayed the wrath of God for what would otherwise be a presumptuous action. The atonement money was a “covering” for sin, and it was the price for their lives. The same price was paid whether you were rich or poor. They paid with the silver that they had gotten in Egypt (God had provided that right before they left), so the Lord ultimately provided the ransom (atonement).

What is the foundation of *our* approach to God? In this Old Testament type we see Jesus Christ who shed His blood as a ransom for His church:

1 Peter 1:18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Revelation 5:9 (ESV) . . . “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Taking A Census Shows Ownership

Taking a census is simply taking inventory of what you have so you know what to do. Only the person who owns the people or things should have the right to count them. In Numbers, God owned His people, and only He had the right to demand that a census be taken.

Later in Scripture we read a story of King David ordering a census:

1 Chronicles 21:1 (NLT) Satan rose up against Israel and caused David to take a census of the people of Israel. ² So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, "Take a census of all the people of Israel—from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north—and bring me a report so I may know how many there are."

³ But Joab replied, "May the Lord increase the number of his people a hundred times over! But why, my lord the king, do you want to do this? Are they not all your servants? Why must you cause Israel to sin?"

⁴ But the king insisted that they take the census, so Joab traveled throughout all Israel to count the people. Then he returned to Jerusalem ⁵ and reported the number of people to David. There were 1,100,000 warriors in all Israel who could handle a sword, and 470,000 in Judah. ⁶ But Joab did not include the tribes of Levi and Benjamin in the census because he was so distressed at what the king had made him do.

⁷ God was very displeased with the census, and he punished Israel for it. ⁸ Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt for doing this foolish thing."

God allowed satan to tempt David to take a census, showing that David was prideful and willful. God dealt with David following this census in a severe way, showing that God means business - He wants us to trust Him, not our own strength. Taking a census was much more than just counting people - it was snubbing the promises of God and discounting the history of God's care, provision, and deliverance in the past. It was a serious offense.

The offense of counting the people was so great in God's sight that He gave David a choice of three punishments for his sin - three years of famine, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or three days of plague. David chose the third, and the Lord then punished Israel with a plague which killed 70,000.

Furthermore, when David commanded that the census be taken, no ransom money was collected as God had commanded in Exodus 30. God had warned in Exodus that a plague would come if the ransom (atonement) was not paid. Paying the ransom signified God's ownership over their lives and kept balance in the whole process. Taking a census is an affront to God because it shows a lack of trust in Him, and paying the ransom money was the only way to keep away His wrath.

The plague came and David was at a loss to know what to do. In this story we see the power of sin over our lives. Sin kills and destroys. Our own willfulness leads to destruction. What was going to turn things around?

1 Chronicles 21:16 (NLT) David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth with his sword drawn, reaching out over Jerusalem. So David and the leaders of Israel put on burlap to show their deep distress and fell face down on the ground. ¹⁷ And David said to God, "I

am the one who called for the census! I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are as innocent as sheep—what have they done? O Lord my God, let your anger fall against me and my family, but do not destroy your people.”

Ah! Now David is getting around to the right attitude. He repents before God. Even his questioning is okay because He humbles himself before God and wants to take the blame and the hurt himself.

David Builds an Altar

¹⁸ Then the angel of the Lord told Gad [the prophet] to instruct David to go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. ¹⁹ So David went up to do what the Lord had commanded him through Gad. ²⁰ Araunah, who was busy threshing wheat at the time, turned and saw the angel there. His four sons, who were with him, ran away and hid. ²¹ When Araunah saw David approaching, he left his threshing floor and bowed before David with his face to the ground.

²² David said to Araunah, “Let me buy this threshing floor from you at its full price. Then I will build an altar to the Lord there, so that he will stop the plague.”

²³ “Take it, my lord the king, and use it as you wish,” Araunah said to David. “I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, and the threshing boards for wood to build a fire on the altar, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give it all to you.”

It is in the heart of man to think that he can pay his own price for his redemption. The carnal man says, “I’ll pay the price for my soul.”

²⁴ But King David replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on buying it for the full price. I will not take what is yours and give it to the Lord. I will not present burnt offerings that have cost me nothing!” ²⁵ So David gave Araunah 600 pieces of gold in payment for the threshing floor.

Here, in David we see a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ (the son of David), who paid the price for our sins with the full price. No one else could pay this price. The death of the 70,000 could not pay the price. Only an acceptable sacrifice to God would pay the price. We should also note that this piece of real estate that David purchased became the place where Solomon’s Temple was built. Scripture says this is Mount Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac (2 Chron. 3:1). David paid for the foundation of the Temple, just as the children of Israel paid for the foundation of the Tabernacle in Exodus.

But the greatest lesson is that Jesus paid for the foundation of our salvation. He shed His blood and gave His life so that we could be saved through His great plan of salvation. The ransom that He paid made it all possible. We must note that the property David bought was also very near to the place where Jesus died on the cross (the mountains of Moriah).

²⁶ David built an altar there to the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. And when David prayed, the Lord answered him by sending fire from heaven to burn up the offering on the altar.

²⁷ Then the Lord spoke to the angel, who put the sword back into its sheath.

What an incredible turn-around! David’s willfulness brought destruction to his people, but obedience to God changed everything. The death angel’s sword was

put away. And, glory to God, the fire of God came down from heaven. That is the result of doing things God's way - death is stayed, and the fire falls!

Numbers Chapter 2

Organization for Israel's Camp

Numbers 2:1 (NLT) Then the Lord gave these instructions to Moses and Aaron: ²“When the Israelites set up camp, each tribe will be assigned its own area. The tribal divisions will camp beneath their family banners on all four sides of the Tabernacle, but at some distance from it.

³⁻⁴“The divisions of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun are to camp toward the sunrise on the east side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

Tribe Leader, Number

Judah

Nahshon son of Amminadab

74,600

⁵⁻⁶ Issachar

Nethanel son of Zuar

54,400

⁷⁻⁸ Zebulun

Eliab son of Helon

57,400

⁹ So the total of all the troops on Judah's side of the camp is 186,400. These three tribes are to lead the way whenever the Israelites travel to a new campsite.

Many sermons have been preached by Apostolic ministers regarding this subject. Judah is to lead the way in battle. The name *Judah* means “praise.” There is great significance in this. When we face battles of life, when we battle in prayer, when we intercede on someone's behalf - the first thing we need to do is to worship Jesus. Why do Pentecostal churches emphasize spiritual worship so much? Because worship brings the victory! As one song says, “Worship is the way the battle is won.”

Numbers 2:10-11 “The divisions of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad are to camp on the south side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

Tribe Leader, Number

Reuben

Elizur son of Shedeur

46,500

¹²⁻¹³ Simeon

Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai

59,300

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Gad

Eliasaph son of Deuel

45,650

¹⁶ So the total of all the troops on Reuben's side of the camp is 151,450. These three tribes will be second in line whenever the Israelites travel.

¹⁷ “Then the Tabernacle, carried by the Levites, will set out from the middle of the camp. All the tribes are to travel in the same order that they camp, each in position under the appropriate family banner.

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ “The divisions of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin are to camp on the west side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

Tribe Leader, Number

Ephraim

Elishama son of Ammihud

40,500

20-21 Manasseh

Gamaliel son of Pedahzur

32,200

22-23 Benjamin

Abidan son of Gideoni

35,400

²⁴ So the total of all the troops on Ephraim's side of the camp is 108,100. These three tribes will be third in line whenever the Israelites travel.

²⁵⁻²⁶ "The divisions of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali are to camp on the north side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners. These are the names of the tribes, their leaders, and the numbers of their registered troops:

Tribe Leader, Number

Dan

Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai

62,700

27-28 Asher

Pagiel son of Ocran

41,500

29-30 Naphtali

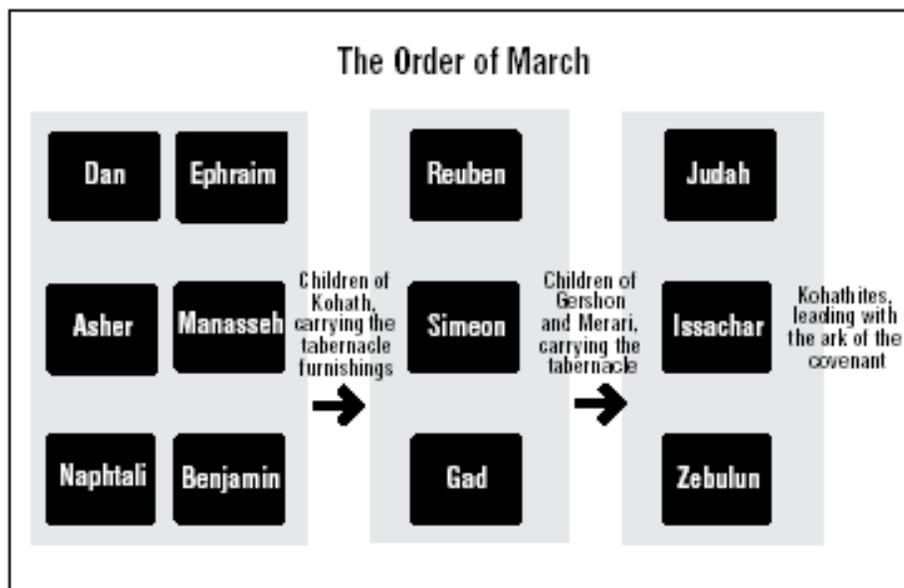
Ahira son of Enan

53,400

³¹ So the total of all the troops on Dan's side of the camp is 157,600. These three tribes will be last, marching under their banners whenever the Israelites travel."

³² In summary, the troops of Israel listed by their families totaled 603,550. ³³ But as the Lord had commanded, the Levites were not included in this registration. ³⁴ So the people of Israel did everything as the Lord had commanded Moses. Each clan and family set up camp and marched under their banners exactly as the Lord had instructed them.

The Israelite camp had a certain order when camped, and it had a certain order when on the march. Numbers 10 gives more information regarding this order. The Ark of the Covenant led the way as Israel marched. The presence of God led them, and then Judah (praise) followed it. Look at the chart below:



Banners identified the different tribes. The Old Testament does not say what exactly was on the banners, but Jewish tradition teaches that there were four banners for the four groups - Judah's banner with a lion, Reuben's banner with a man, Ephraim's banner with an ox, and Dan's banner with an eagle. If you are a Bible student, you may recognize these figures from passages in Ezekiel 1:1-27 & 10:1-22 and Revelation 4:1-8.

The Arrangement of the Camp of Israel Numbers 2:1-3:39

