

Numbers Chapter 1 Continued

Verses 17-46: The numbers from the tribes were:

Reuben	46,500 (verse 21);
Simeon	59,300 (verse 23);
Gad	45,650 (verse 25);
Judah	74,600 (verse 27);
Issachar	54,400 (verse 29);
Zebulun	57,400 (verse 31);
Ephraim	40,500 (verse 33);
Manasseh	32,200 (verse 35);
Benjamin	35,400 (verse 37);
Dan	62,700 (verse 39);
Asher	41,500 (verse 41);
Naphtali	53,400 (verse 43);
Total	603,550 (verse 46).

The tribal order follows the pattern of Jacob's wives: First, the sons of Leah, second, the sons of Rachel; and third, the sons of the maids, except Gad (born of Leah's maid), who replaced Levi in the third-born position (compare Gen. 29:31 to 30:24, 35:16 to 20).

Numbers 1:17 "And Moses and Aaron took these men which are expressed by [their] names:"

They doubtless sent for them, and acquainted them with the nomination of them, by the Lord himself, for such a service. And they took them with them to the place where the number of the people was to be taken.

"Which are expressed by their names (in Num. 1:16), and that as declared by the mouth of God himself.

In the last lesson, we saw the names of the various tribes mentioned, and the princes who would be the leaders of each tribe. Moses and Aaron are in charge of this numbering. All the men 20 years and older, who could go to war are to be counted.

Numbers 1:18 "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."

The month Iyar, as the Targum of Jonathan, answering to part of April and May. This was done on the selfsame day the Lord spake unto Moses about this affair (Num. 1:1). So expeditious were he and Aaron in doing the will of God.

"And they declared their pedigrees": Either Moses and Aaron, according to Aben Ezra, who inquired when they were born, because of the computation of twenty years. And then their birth was written down, as he says. Or rather the people declared their pedigrees, of what tribe, family, and house they were, who was their parents, when born, and so of course, how old they were. Jarchi interprets it, they brought the books of their genealogies, and witnesses to confirm the birth of every one of them, to show their genealogy according to their tribe. Nor is it at all unlikely that every family and house, or master thereof, kept a register of those born to him in it, whereby their age could be ascertained as well as pedigree.

"After their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of their names, "from twenty years old and upwards, by their polls": That is, every tribe gave an account of the families in it. Every family what houses were in it, and every house what number of males were in it, and of what age. And such were numbered who were twenty years old and upward.

The "pedigrees" are speaking of their right by birth to be of a certain tribe. They were separated into groups, who represented the families of the 12 tribes of Israel. In the group who were equipped for war, there was no mention of the Levitical tribe. That tribe is set aside for God's purposes. This number closely coincides with the number that had been polled for the tax in the tabernacle.

Numbers 1:19 "As the LORD commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai."

In this Moses and David differed in numbering the people of Israel. The one did it by an express command from God, and in obedience to it. The other without one, and against his will (1 Chron. 21:17).

Like Abram (Abraham, in Genesis 12:4), "Moses" obeyed "as the LORD commanded". The Book of Numbers, however, describes a litany of events in which the people did not heed the Lord (e.g., chapters 13-14), and even a sad occasion when Moses did not (20:1-13). Obedience has to be ongoing; occasional obedience is not enough for the children of God.

This command is no different than what we read about in Exodus. God gave the message to Moses, Moses gave the message to Aaron, and Aaron gave the message to the people. The numbering was done in the wilderness of Sinai.

Numbers 1:20 "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;"

Were numbered first, and next to them those of Simeon and Gad, for they were numbered according to the order in which they were to be encamped. For under Reuben's standard were Simeon and Gad, and under Judah's Issachar and Zebulun, and under Ephraim's Manasseh and Benjamin, and under Dan's Asher and Naphtali. And according to their order were the tribes numbered.

"By their generations": Or "their generations", the birth, descent, and pedigree of them.

"After their families, by the house of their fathers": According to the families and houses to which they belonged.

"According to the number of the names by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward": Their names were taken down, the number of them counted by their heads, even all the males that were above twenty years of age.

"All that were able to go forth to war": Which phrase, as it suggests that before this age they were not reckoned able bodied men for war, in common, though some might. So it seems to except all infirm persons, by reason of age and otherwise.

Now in all the other account of the numbering of the rest of the tribes, the same forms of expression are used as here. Only the tribe of Simeon, which is the next, these words are left out, "by their polls, every male", which being twice observed, need not be repeated. Since by these instances it might be sufficiently known that the number was taken by a poll, and only of males. So that in (Num. 1:23), there is nothing material to observe, or anything different from what is in this verse, but the particular sums of each tribe numbered.

Which stand thus: Of the tribe of Reuben 46,500; of the tribe of Simeon, 59,300; of the tribe of Gad, 45,650; of the tribe of Judah, 74,600; of the tribe of Issachar, 54,400; of the tribe of Zebulun, 57,400; of the tribe of Ephraim, 40,500; of the tribe of Manasseh, 32,200; of the tribe of Benjamin 35,400; of the tribe of Dan, 62,700; of the tribe of Asher 41,500; of the tribe of Naphtali, 53,400.

In which may be observed the various increase of the tribes, agreeably to divine predictions, and according to the sovereign will and infinite wisdom of God. Reuben, the firstborn, did not excel in number. Six of the tribes having more in number than he. Judah had by far the greatest increase of them all, from whom the chief ruler was to come, and even the King Messiah. And in process of time was to become a kingdom of itself. Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, was much more fruitful than Manasseh, his elder. More than eight thousand being numbered of the former than of the latter, all which agree with Jacob's prophecies (Gen. 49:4). Nor had they always the greatest number who had the most sons at their going down into Egypt. For though Simeon, who had then more sons than Reuben, had at this time a larger posterity; yet Gad, who had more than Simeon, had now fewer descendants. And Dan, who had but one son at that time, had now almost double the number of Benjamin, who then had ten sons. And it may be observed of other tribes, that their increase was not in proportion to the number of the sons of the patriarchs then (see Gen. 46:8).

We discussed in lesson one, that Reuben was the first son of Jacob's wife, Leah.

Numbers 1:21 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Reuben, [were] forty and six thousand and five hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

We also discussed that the number is probably not accurate to the last man, but was very close. Perhaps that is why the number is rounded to 46,500.

Numbers 1:22 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:23 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Simeon, [were] fifty and nine thousand and three hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

All of the same things apply here, as in the verses before, but the number is different. There were 59,300. Simeon was Leah's second son.

Numbers 1:24 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:25 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Gad, [were] forty and five thousand six hundred and fifty."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

The number of Gad's family was not rounded to the nearest hundred, but to the nearest fifty. There were 45,650 in Gad's tribe. You will notice, this is in a different order than the listings earlier. Gad was encamped with Reuben and Simeon, and perhaps that is the reason for this order here. Gad was from the handmaid Zilpah.

Numbers 1:26 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:27 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Judah, [were] threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

The tribe of Judah is the tribe that Jesus was born into. Judah is the fourth son of Leah. Those that were numbered of the tribe of Judah were 74,600.

Numbers 1:28 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:29 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Issachar, [were] fifty and four thousand and four hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Issachar was the fifth son of Leah, Jacob's first wife. Those that were numbered of them are 54,400. We must remember all of these children are of Jacob. All 12 tribes stem from him. Jacob's name was changed to Israel by God.

Numbers 1:30 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:31 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Zebulun, [were] fifty and seven thousand and four hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Zebulun was the sixth and last of the sons of Leah. Those that were numbered of Zebulun's tribe were 57,400.

Numbers 1:32 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:33 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Ephraim, [were] forty thousand and five hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

We find, in this, a separation of the tribe of Joseph. Of the tribe of Ephraim of the tribe of Joseph, they counted 40,500. Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob.

Numbers 1:34 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:35 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Manasseh, [were] thirty and two thousand and two hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Manasseh is another son of Joseph. This tribe of Manasseh is also from the root tribe of Joseph. Those that were numbered of Manasseh's tribe were 32,200.

Numbers 1:36 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:37 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Benjamin, [were] thirty and five thousand and four hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Benjamin was the younger brother of Joseph. Rachel was their mother and Jacob their father. Those numbered of his tribe were 35,400.

Numbers 1:38 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:39 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Dan, [were] threescore and two thousand and seven hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

It is very strange that the tribe of Dan is not mentioned (in chapter 7 of Revelation), where they are sealed for protection. His tribe, above, numbers 62,700.

Numbers 1:40 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:41 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Asher, [were] forty and one thousand and five hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

The tribe of Asher numbered 41,500.

Numbers 1:42 "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;"

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Numbers 1:43 "Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Naphtali, [were] fifty and three thousand and four hundred."

See notes (on Numbers 1:20).

Naphtali's tribe numbered 53,400.

Numbers 1:44 "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."

Or, as the Targum of Jonathan, these are the sums of the numbers. Namely, those before given of the several respective tribes.

"Which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men": For though the tribe of Levi was not numbered, yet Joseph having a double portion. His two sons are reckoned as distinct tribes. So that one out of each tribe made up the number twelve.

"Each one for the house of his fathers": For the tribe he belonged to, with which it might reasonably be supposed he was best acquainted, and could more readily take the number of them.

The princes mentioned here are 12. We know that this list does not exactly follow the list of the sons of Jacob, because Levi is left out. They were not to go to war. The sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), take up the space of the Levitical tribe.

Numbers 1:45 "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;"

Of all the tribes, excepting Levi. That is, all the sums of the number of the children of Israel; all put together made the sum total given in the next verse.

"By the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel": All in every tribe, family, and house, that were above twenty years of age. Healthful and strong, and fit for war.

We must remember that the women and children, both male and female, were not numbered. They were not warriors. We may safely assume the really old men were not counted as well.

Numbers 1:46 "Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty."

“Six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty”: This number, combined with the 22,000 Levite males a month old and above (3:39), allows for a total population of well over 2,000,000 Israelites. Since this number seems too high for the wilderness conditions and relatively few firstborn sons (3:43), some have reinterpreted the plain meaning of the text by:

- (1) Saying “thousand” means “clan” or “chief” here; or
- (2) Stating the numbers are symbolic.

However, if “thousand” is not the meaning in this chapter (1:46 would read 598 “clans” or “chiefs” with only 5,500 individuals). Thus, the meaning “thousand” must be retained. Further, there is no textual indication that these numbers are symbolic. The only conclusion is that God took care of well over 2,000,000 people in the wilderness during the period of 40 years (compare Deut. 8:3-4). Tampering with the number is tampering with God’s purpose for these numbers, to show His power in behalf of Israel.

The total of all the young men counted from all of the tribes was counted 603,550. This number has increased about 13,000 people since the Exodus. We can safely assume from this, that the entire population count of all the Israelites would be somewhere between 2 and 3 million. From the spiritual standpoint, we can easily see that God’s army is a large number of people. Every person who proclaims Christianity is in God’s army.

Numbers 1:47 "But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them."

The nonmilitary tribe of Levi had a separate census and did not receive a tribal allotment of land. They were to transport, erect, and guard the tabernacle. They had to camp around it to prevent ordinary laymen from approaching it unprepared, so that “no wrath upon the congregation” (verse 53), from the Lord would come upon them. If someone approached wrongfully, he was to “be put to death”. This drastic measure certainly would express the reality of God’s presence with His people (Exodus 19:11-13, 21-24). Even today men must approach God with reverent fear (Matt. 5:23-26; Acts 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 11:27-32; Heb. 12:18-29).

The Levites were to care for things of the tabernacle, and were not to be weighted down with serving in war. They were the spiritual leaders of their people.

Numbers 1:48 "For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying,"

Again, we see that every detail is given to Moses directly from God.

Not to number the Levites, when he gave him the orders to number the rest of the tribes. This is observed, lest it should be thought that this was what Moses did of himself, out of affection to the tribe he was of. And to spare it, that it might not be obliged to go forth to war when others did. Not that they were forbid to engage in war, or that it was unlawful for them so to do, for when necessity required, and they were of themselves willing to engage in it. They might, as appears in the case of the Maccabees, but they might not be forced into it. They were, as Josephus says, exempted from it. And so all concerned in religious service, both among Heathens and Christians, have always been excused bearing arms.

"Saying": As follows.

Numbers 1:49 "Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel:"

That is, along with the other tribes, for it might be numbered by itself, as it afterwards was (Num. 3:43).

"Neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel": Which confirms what is before observed. Now this being the declared will of God clears Moses from all partiality to his own tribe, he doing nothing but what he had a command of God for it.

God had strictly forbidden the numbering of the Levites with the warriors.

Numbers 1:50 "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."

The tribe of Levi, including Moses and Aaron, was not included in this census because it was exempt from military service. The Levites were to serve the Lord by carrying and attending to the tabernacle (compare 3:5-13; 4:1-33, 46-49).

“Tabernacle” (“tent”), emphasizes the temporary nature of this house of God, and the “testimony” signifies God’s covenantal relationship with Israel (see note on Exodus 25:10-22).

We see that special care is to be given to the tabernacle. God has chosen this tribe for the purpose of serving Him in and around the tabernacle. The presence of God was over the mercy seat. The tabernacle was to be kept holy inside, and was also to be protected from the entering of the

worldly as well. They were anointed of God to serve Him and the people. They must not be mixed in with the world.

Numbers 1:51 "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."

“The stranger”: This word often refers to the “alien” or “stranger”. The non-Levite Israelite was like a “foreigner” to the transporting of the tabernacle and had to keep his distance lest he die.

"Stranger" here, means someone who has not been authorized of God to do this work. The Levites were set aside for this purpose, in the book of Leviticus. No one with unclean hands was to touch anything of the tabernacle. God had given specific instructions on how all of this was to be handled. Even the sons of Aaron, who brought strange fire into the tabernacle, were killed. All of the things of God are holy.

Numbers 1:52 "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."

There were four, unless every tribe was a camp. And so then there were twelve camps, besides the camp of the Levites. The Targum of Jonathan is, "by the house of his troop," the regiment to which he belonged, every tribe or camp having various troops or regiments in it.

"And every man by his own standard throughout their hosts": There were four standards, and three tribes to each standard, which were placed east, west, north, and south of the tabernacle. As is at large described in the following chapter.

Each tribe was assigned their place in the camp. They were assigned a place to march as well. Only the Levitical tribe was gathered around the tabernacle. The others were settled out in the east, west, north, or south. With close to 3 million people, you can see the necessity for order.

Numbers 1:53 "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."

“No wrath”: The purpose of setting the Levites apart and arranging them around the tabernacles was to keep the wrath of the Lord from consuming Israel (compare Exodus 32:10, 25-29).

One of the things the Levites were to do, was to set up an area around the tabernacle, and keep all others out of that area. Someone might wander in this area and be killed, if it were not safely guarded.

Numbers 1:54 "And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they."

Pitched their tents by their own camps and standards. Did not come near the tabernacle but kept at a proper distance from it, and did not meddle with things they had no concern with, and which were peculiar to the Levites.

"So did they": Which is repeated to show how readily, punctually, and perfectly they observed the command of God with respect to this affair.

It is important for us, as well as for the tribes of Israel, to heed the wishes of the LORD. God had promised to bless them, if they obeyed His commandments.

Numbers Chapter 1 Continued Questions

1. Who was in charge of the numbering?
2. When did they assemble the people?
3. What are "pedigrees" speaking of?
4. Who were numbered?
5. God gave the message to Moses, and Moses gave it to whom?
6. Who was Israel's oldest son?
7. Who was his mother?
8. How many of the tribe of Reuben were numbered?
9. How many of Simeon's tribe were numbered?
10. Why is the order given here different from the order in the first lesson?
11. What tribe was Jesus birthed into?
12. Who was Jacob's first wife?
13. Who was the last son birthed to Leah?
14. What was different about the tribe of Joseph?
15. Who was the favorite son of Jacob?
16. _____ was the younger brother of Joseph.
17. Who was their mother?
18. What is peculiar about the tribe of Dan?

19. How many princes were there?
20. Why was the tribe of Levi left out of this list?
21. How many men, over 20, of all the tribes were there?
22. Approximately how many Israelites all together were there including women and children?
23. The Levites were appointed over the _____ of _____.
24. What purpose had God chosen the Levites for?
25. "Stranger", in verse 51, means what?
26. Where were they to pitch their tents?
27. Where were the Levites to pitch their tents?
28. Did they obey God's wishes?