

NOTES ON *NUMBERS*

Introduction

In the book of Leviticus, the nation of Israel sat at the foot of Mt. Sinai and listened to the Law of the Lord. Now, after one year at Sinai, they were ready to move again toward the promised land of Canaan. Numbers records for us the continuing story of God's chosen people— the people from whom the Savior of the world would be born. In the book, God's anger toward sin is evident as well as the grace and mercy He shows toward His people. Certainly a group such as Israel would not have survived a month in their journey without the guiding hand of the Lord leading them to water, to rest, and to victory over their enemies. The events recorded in these chapters cover an approximate time from 1445-1405 BC.

If one were to choose a theme for Numbers, it could well be *The Lord is With Us*. In countless ways the LORD demonstrated His presence among His people. With a pillar of cloud and fire He led them by day and night. Through Moses He communicated His word and will to them. He was with them in their worship life as the tabernacle was His special dwelling place. He supported them with an astounding number of miracles which accomplished several things:

- 1) Preserved the nation of Israel for the coming Messiah
- 2) Build faith in Israel which had been weakened by Egyptian idolatry
- 3) Make an impact on the surrounding nations

(Halley)

Unfortunately, the people were not as faithful to God as He was to them. Time and time again they grumbled against Him and all that He was trying to do for them. In fact, Numbers has also been called the "book of murmurings."

Jesus is also foreshadowed several times in the book. Particularly in the account of Moses and the bronze serpent in chapter 21. We know this to be a picture of the Christ from John's reference in 3:14 of his gospel. Thus Numbers is also part of the spiritual history of all people— showing man's sin and God's loving plan for its removal.

The Census in Israel (Chapter 1)

It is from this very first chapter that the book of Numbers derives its name. Recorded here is the first census taken of the Israelites. The census counted all the men 20 years old and older who were able to fight in battle. God assigned the leaders from each tribe in Israel (except Levi) to help Moses and Aaron with the project. The census came out like this:

Reuben	46,500
Simeon	59,300
Gad	45,650
Judah	74,600
Issachar	54,400
Zebulun	57,400
Ephraim	40,500
Manasseh	32,200
Benjamin	35,400
Dan	62,700
Asher	41,500
Naphtali	53,400

The total number counted was 603,550. The tribe of Levi was not counted. Members of Levi were in charge of taking care of the tabernacle and all its furnishings and were not considered "able to serve in the army" (v49-54).

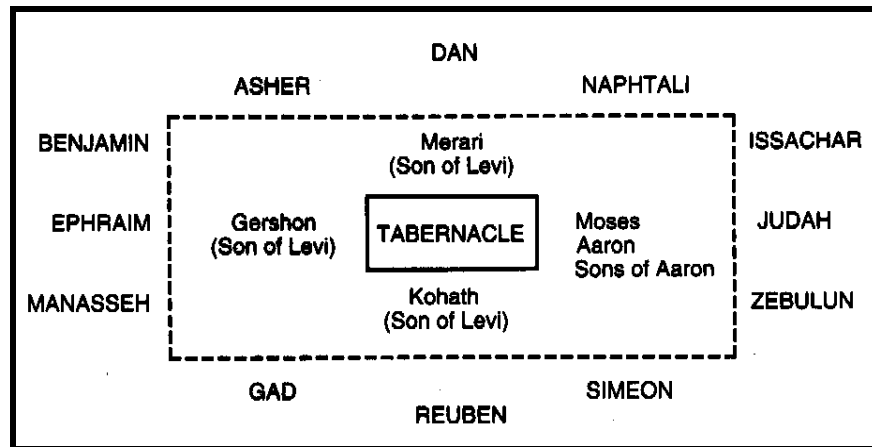
Why do you suppose this census was taken?

Does the census suggest anything about God fulfilling His promises?

Some Bible critics have disputed the number given by the census, claiming that it is too high and cannot possibly be accurate. They argue that such a number would suggest that the Israelites comprised between two and three million people. But remember that it had been 430 years since Jacob and his family went down to Egypt. More than 14 generations of people could have been born in that time. It is not impossible at all to consider such growth of Jacob's family.

Arranging the Israelite Camp (Chapter 2)

Following the census, God set to arranging how the tribes would be arranged as they travelled and camped together. All would camp around the Tent of Meeting in a specific location and order. When they moved, they would move in a specified order as well. See the diagram below for the arrangement of the camp. The Levites were to set up their tents around the tabernacle itself (1:53) .



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- # Do you think there was any symbolism in the way the tribes were organized at camp?
- # After the hasty departure from Egypt and the march down to Mt. Sinai, it must have been nice for Israel to have some organization as 2:34 now indicates!

Instructions to the Levites (Chapter 3)

In this chapter, the LORD goes into more detail about the tribe of Levi. The descendants of Levi were separate from the other tribes because they had a special job, namely to care for the tabernacle and the things of God. They had been granted this special position because they had been the ones who had spoken out against the worship of the golden calf (Ex 32) . We might say that the Levites were the "clergy" in Israel.

Verses 1-10 Certain Levites were to be priests, namely Aaron' s sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar, and their descendants. Nadab and Abihu were put to death after bringing unauthorized fire before the LORD, so only Eleazar and Ithamar remained as priests along with Aaron the High Priest. The other Levites were to assist the priests in the service of the Tent of Meeting. God announced that the Levites were His special possession.

Now it was time for a census of the Levites to be taken. The Levites were counted by the number of males a month old or more and were divided into three families corresponding to the sons of Levi. As they were counted they were also given instructions as to what their tasks would be. The total number of Levites recorded was 22,000.

Gershonites Pop: 7,500
Camp: West of the tabernacle
Leader: Eliasaph
Tasks: Care of the tent, coverings, curtains, courtyard curtains and ropes

Kohathites Pop: 8,600
Camp: South of the tabernacle
Leader: Elizaphan
Supervisor: Eleazar son of Aaron
Tasks: Care of the sanctuary and its furnishings

Merarites Pop: 6,200
Camp: North of the tabernacle
Leader: Zuriel
Tasks: The frame of the tabernacle and courtyard (tent pegs, posts, etc.)

Moses, Aaron and his sons camped on the east side of the tabernacle toward the sunrise. They were ultimately responsible for all the care of God' s house. They were the mediators between the people and the house of the LORD. As the only ones who could approach the sanctuary, anyone else who tried was to be put to death.

You might recall that in Leviticus God had specified that every firstborn in Israel belonged to Him. Here God announced that He would take the Levites and their livestock as the "redemption price" for all the firstborn people and animals in Israel (v41) . When the firstborn in Israel were counted, there were 22,273– 273 more than the number of Levites. Money was given to redeem the additional (vv44-51) .

God was insistent that nobody but the Levites should approach the sanctuary.

Notes: