

NUMBERS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Numbers chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God and we begin this new book. First of all we don't get the title from the Hebrew Scriptures but from the Septuagint or the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. They called it ARITHMOI or Numbers because we see two numberings of the children of Israel in this book. The first is at Mount Sinai and the second was taken in the plains of Moab. In the Hebrew Scriptures it is called BEMIDBAR or "in the wilderness."

The book of Exodus covered a time period of about 1 year, focusing only on the period from the exodus on. Obviously the book of Exodus opens up with the birth of Moses and the oppression of God's people in Egypt, which is some 80 years or more, but the focus is the exodus onward. Then, as we moved into the book of Leviticus we saw this cover a period of time of about 1 month.

As we move into the book of Numbers we will see that the period of time covered here is about 39 years. You see, the 11-day journey it was to take them to get to the Promise Land would take them 40 years because of unbelief. In fact, that first generation would die off in the wilderness and it would be the next generation, that second census that would enter into the Promise Land under the leadership of Joshua.

Keep in mind that the wilderness was never intended to be the destination for the children of Israel, but unbelief kept them there until they could learn the lesson and walk by faith. How true that is in our own lives! Irving L. Jensen put it like this:

Numbers has a unique contribution to the life of the Christian when the broad sequence of its historical setting is seen as a parallel situation to Christian living. The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews makes this significant application, devoting two chapters to it (Heb. 3 and 4).

- Irving L. Jensen

So there are many lessons the Holy Spirit has for us as we go through this book. You see, the book focuses on walking by faith and spiritual progress. Thus, it is important for us to learn as Paul said in Romans 15:4, **“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”**

Now, for me, Moses wrote the book of Numbers, it is the fourth book in the Pentateuch. Many today, the so-called higher critics have many ideas who wrote the book and when it was written. I might not have a PhD in theology but I do believe it is very simple to figure out!

As we go through this book there are some 150 references in more than 20 different ways stating that **“the LORD spoke to Moses.”** Thus, what the Lord spoke to Moses he wrote down for future generations. That may be very simplistic, but I believe it is correct!

Morgan had this to say regarding the book of Numbers. He wrote:

So the Israelites had been slaves in the land of Goshen; their tasks were appointed, and their taskmasters compelled their obedience. Their difficulties had been great, their bondage cruel, but they were free from the necessity of thought and arrangement. Having escaped from their taskmaster, they imagined that freedom meant escape from rule. They had been taught in their year of encampment under the shadow of the mountain that they had to submit to law, and it was irksome to them, and they became discontented. This discontent resulted from lack of perfect confidence in God.

- Morgan

Again, I see the same with us. We come to Christ and we have all this freedom but we then think there is no Law. No, the Law is there, not for our salvation, but for our blessing. You see, we can allow the freedom we have in Christ to cause us to become in bondage to sin, slaves to sin. We need to be wise with the freedom we have in Christ!

One last point before we get to our text this evening and that is a basic outline of this book.

A. THE OLD GENERATION – NUMBERS CHAPTERS 1-10

B. THE FAILING OF THE OLD GENERATION – NUMBERS CHAPTERS 11-25

C. THE NEW GENERATION RAISED UP – NUMBERS CHAPTERS 26-36

With that said, let's begin reading in Numbers chapter 1, starting in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

NUMBERS 1**VERSES 1-3**

1. The Law has been given, the tabernacle erected and now it was time to take a census of all those who could fight in battle, all males 20 years old and up. Why was this necessary? Because now God was preparing them to enter the Promise Land and thus, they needed to be ready to do battle with the enemy. Yes, the battle belongs to the Lord, but they needed to enter in by faith and do battle as the Lord lead them!

VERSES 4-16

1. Here we see who is going to represent the 12 tribes of Israel, 1 man from each tribe. Keep in mind that the tribe of Levi is left out but there are still 12 tribes. How can that be? Because Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and Jacob back in Genesis adopted them in. The tribe of Levi was not counted for their service was unto the Lord, priestly duties, and we will see that as we move on in this chapter.

2. One little side note here. In verse 7, from the tribe of Judah we see Nahshon mentioned and in Matthew 1:4 he is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ!

VERSES 17-19

1. These leaders from those 12 tribes of Israel were responsible for the census in their own tribe and then reporting back to Moses. We now will see the numbers of soldiers who could fight in battle. We won't read through this but we will look at the numbers for each tribe.

VERSES 20-21

1. The tribe of Ruben had 46,500 men ready for war.

VERSES 22-23

1. The tribe of Simeon had 59,300 men ready for war.

VERSES 24-25

1. The tribe of Gad had 45,650 men ready for war.

VERSES 26-27

1. The tribe of Judah had 74,600 men ready for war.

VERSES 28-29

1. The tribe of Issachar had 54,400 men ready for war.

VERSES 30-31

1. The tribe of Zebulun had 57,400 men ready for war.

VERSES 32-33

1. The tribe of Ephraim had 40,500 men ready for war.

VERSES 34-35

1. The tribe of Manasseh had 32,200 men ready for war.

VERSES 36-37

1. The tribe of Benjamin had 35,400 men ready for war.

VERSES 38-39

1. The tribe of Dan had 62,700 men ready for war.

VERSES 40-41

1. The tribe of Asher had 41,500 men ready for war.

VERSES 42-43

1. The tribe of Naphtali had 53,400 men ready for war.

VERSES 44-46

1. So the total number of men who were able to go to war from the 12 tribes of Israel was 603,550 men!

VERSES 47-54

1. Again, the reason the tribe of Levi was left out of this census of soldiers was because they were not to fight, they needed to care for the things of God, the tabernacle and all the duties that went along with it. They were exempt from military service.

NUMBERS 2VERSES 1-2

1. Why was it so important how they set up camp? With all these people there needed to be organization and God wanted them to set up with the tabernacle in the center of the camp for it was the place of worship. He wanted their focus to be on Him and thus, the camp of Israel is organized on how they set up their camp. As we go through this we will do an overview of these verses and you will see the picture that God is painting for us even here in the camp of Israel!

VERSES 3-9

1. On the east side of the camp were the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Now the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun were under the lead tribe of Judah, whose banner was a gold lion on a scarlet background. Thus, when the pillar of fire or the cloud, which represented the presence of God, the Shekinah glory, began to move, Judah and those tribes associated with them moved first in the camp. Also, the total number of men able to go to war, 20 years old and above was 186,400 from these three tribes. Interestingly enough the Gospel according to Matthew presents Jesus as the Lion from the tribe of Judah and here in the camp we see the very same thing, Judah with its banner of a lion. So in the camp of Israel we see the kingship of Jesus.

VERSES 10-16

1. On the south side of the camp were the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad. Now the tribes of Simeon and Gad were under the lead tribe of Reuben, whose banner was a man on a background of gold. These three tribes were the second group to move out and the total number of men that could go to war from these three tribes was 151,450.

Again, the man speaks of humanity, and in the Gospel according to Luke we see Luke present Jesus as the "Son of Man," speaking of His humanity. And once again we see a picture of the humanity of Jesus in this banner.

VERSE 17

1. In the middle of the camp were the Levites with Moses, Aaron and the priests camping by the entrance of the tabernacle on the east side. After the first two groups broke camp, then the Tabernacle was to be moved and then two other groups behind the Tabernacle, to guard and protect those that could not fight. The other families of Levi also camped around the tabernacle with the Kohathites on the south side, the Merarites on the north side, and the Gershonites on the west side. And their responsibility was the care of the tabernacle including its upkeep, its transportation and-so-on. We will deal with them as we move on in our study of Numbers.

VERSES 18-24

1. On the west side of the camp were the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. Now the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin were under the lead tribe of Ephraim, whose banner was a black ox on a gold background. These three tribes were the third group to move out when camp broke, and the total number of men that could go to war from this group of three tribes was 108,000. Again, the ox or the calf is a beast of burden. It is the Gospel according to Mark that we see Mark present to us Jesus as the suffering servant. And again we see a picture of the servanthood of Jesus in this banner.

VERSES 25-31

1. On the north side of the camp were the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. Now the tribes of Asher and Naphtali were under the lead tribe of Dan, whose banner was a gold eagle on a blue background. These tribes were the fourth group to move out when it was time for them to break camp. And the total number of men that could go to war in these three tribes was 157,600. Again, the eagle represents supreme sovereignty as he soars through the heavens. It is the Gospel according to John who presents Jesus as the Son of God! And that is the picture we see here in this banner, the deity of Jesus.

VERSES 32-34

1. God is a God of order, even in the camp. And, surrounding the tabernacle, protecting it were 603,550 soldiers!

2. What does this all mean to us? Why is God so detailed here? Let me share with you a few points and you will see that only God could orchestrate something like this. First of all, as you looked at the camp of Israel, understand that their tents always faced towards the tabernacle, which was located in the center of the camp. And so, when you wake-up in the morning the first thing you would see is the smoke from the morning sacrifices being offered up. When you went to bed at night, you would see the light of the tabernacle shining, you would see the Shekinah glory burning bright. Thus, the tabernacle was the focus of the nation and needed to be in the heart of the camp, where it was.

And what an important lesson for us to learn as individuals, as a family, and as a nation. The strength of any individual, any family, and any nation is found only when God is in the center, when God is the heart, the focus of their lives. In fact, when communities were being built, many years ago, they would be built around the church, which was the center of the community, and the homes would spread out from there. Thus, the church, a place where people came to worship God, was the focus of their community and their life. It is sad to see we have lost that focus in our society today.

3. Now as you look at the camp of Israel you would always do so from the east, facing the opening of the tabernacle. Now if you take the number of people from each tribe and place them in their position in the camp; north, south, east and west, you will find your vertical axis will have a slightly longer dimension on the bottom than on the top, 186,400 to 108,000. The horizontal axis will be almost equal, south to north, 151, 450 to 157, 600. Now in the center of the camp is where the tabernacle was located. And in the tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant, located in the holy of holies. And this is the place where God dwelt, above the mercy seat, which was located on the top of the Ark of the Covenant, between the wings of the Cherubim. In *Exodus 25:22* we read of God meeting with them in this place. The Lord said, "**And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.**"

Now, unbeknown to the children of Israel, or anyone else for that matter, God was giving a beautiful picture of His great love for us. And the only way you could see this picture, as you looked at the camp of Israel, is if you were directly above the camp, if you were flying over it or on a high mountain looking down upon the camp. And if you did look down you would see a picture of a cross, made by the various tribes, which camped east, west, south and north. Not only that, but right in the middle of the cross was where the tabernacle was located, which represented the presence of God. And the sacrifices that were done in the temple would cause the blood of these animals to be spilled. Thus, as you looked at the camp of Israel you would see God in the middle of the cross, sound familiar? You see, the shadows of the cross in the Old Testament are brought to light with Christ, as *HE* is placed right in the center of this picture.

NUMBERS 3

VERSES 1-4

1. Now we will be looking at the priesthood and the Levites, which are not the same. You see, all priests were Levites, descendants from Aaron, but not all Levites were priests because they were not descendants of Aaron. Yes, the Levites took care the things of God but the priests served the Lord. Aaron was the high priest and his two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu were next in line, but because of their sin, God struck them dead. Thus, Eleazar and Ithamar took over and the priesthood was passed on through their descendants.

VERSES 5-10

1. Obviously Aaron and his sons couldn't do all the work and thus, the Levites were there to assist them, not in the priestly duties but in the taking down, setting up and the care of the tabernacle. They also needed to assist the congregation. Again, God is a God of order and He holds a person responsible who disrupts that order - they shall be put to death. We will see this with the rebellion of Korah who wanted more and rebelled against the authority of Moses in Numbers chapter 16, and how God removed that rebellion from the land! God places people in positions and we need to respect that, or, as I have said, God will hold that rebel accountable for his actions.

VERSES 11-13

1. Keep in mind that the firstborn belonged to the Lord but He did not want human sacrifice, so the Levites were taken as Israel's firstborn.

VERSES 14-20

1. So the tribe of Levi was divided up by Levi's three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

VERSES 21-26

1. The Gershonites camped on the west side of the tabernacle, 7,500 males from a month old and up, and they were responsible for the tabernacle, the clothes, the hides and curtains. Keep in mind that you would serve from 30 years old to 50 years!

VERSES 27-32

1. The Kohathites camped on the south side of the tabernacle, 8,600 males from a month old and up, and they were responsible for caring for the furniture of the tabernacle – the Ark of the Covenant, the table of Showbread, the oil-burning lamp and-so-on. And Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest was to oversee the work and the care of these holy things of God, making sure the Kohathites did things correctly.

VERSES 33-37

1. The Merarites camped on the north side of the tabernacle, 6,200 males from a month old and up, and they were responsible for the structural aspects of the tabernacle – the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, cords and-so-on.

VERSES 38-39

1. Camping on the east side of the tabernacle, by the entrance, was Moses, Aaron and their families. Keep in mind no job was too big or too small, but all were important and when you are satisfied in the work God has called you to do, even though it might not be easy, you will have great joy as you serve Him!

2. In verses 22, 28, 34 the total number of Levites was 22,300 and yet, here in verse 39 it is only 22,000. Why the discrepancy in the totals? Some feel it is a copyist error related to the Kohathites being 8,300 instead of 8,600. There is also another explanation that may fit, and that is the 300 are the firstborn of the Levites and thus, excluded. Both are possible and I would not be dogmatic about this. It does not change anything about God!

VERSES 40-51

1. As I have said, the firstborn belong to the Lord and in regards to the children of Israel; the tribe of Levi was given in their place. The only problem was that they were 273 short and thus, God says that five shekels was to be given for each of the 273 and that money was given to the tabernacle as redemption money.

2. One last point here. The number of firstborn sons seems to indicate that only one in 27 sons were firstborns, which is very low when you consider the number of the children of Israel was over 2 million! It is possible that the 22,273 firstborn sons were those born in the thirteen months or so after the exodus from Egypt.

NUMBERS 4**VERSES 1-3**

1. Now we are going to be looking at those who could serve from the Levites who were thirty years old to fifty years old. The first family we will look at will be the Kohathites and their responsibilities.

VERSES 4-14

1. When it was time for the children of Israel to move, as they journeyed to the Promise Land, they did not call two men and a camel to move them! The Kohathites were responsible for the furnishings of the tabernacle and they needed to be careful with the holy things of God. Aaron and his sons would cover the Ark before the Kohathites moved it, for they were not priests and they were not to look upon the Ark!

VERSES 15-20

1. The Kohathites were given a special dispensation by God to transport the furnishings of the tabernacle. If God did not allow this, they would be struck dead! And again, Eleazar the priest, the son of Aaron would supervise the work of the Kohathites.

VERSES 21-28

1. The Gershonites were responsible for the curtains of the tabernacle and-so-on, and Ithamar, the son of Aaron supervised their work.

VERSES 29-33

1. And the Merarites were responsible for the wooden frame and cords and-so-on, for the tabernacle and once again Ithamar, the son of Aaron supervised their work.

VERSES 34-48

1. So the total number of men who were old enough to serve from the sons of Levi were 8,580.

VERSES 49

1. What a boring job, to count all these people and yet God had a plan for each one of them and they obeyed the Lord and did the work. Trouble comes when people try to serve where they are not called or are jealous of the calling of others. God has a plan for each of our lives, He just wants us to be faithful in that calling, in the work He has called us to do. I like the way that Spurgeon put it as he wrote, "It is worthy of note that these Levites, although they were all equally consecrated to God, had not all exactly the same work to perform. God is not the God of all uniformity. There is a wondrous unity of plan and design in all that he does, but there is also an equally marvelous variety."

NUMBERS 5**VERSES 1-2**

1. Why did God do this? To stop the spread of diseases within the camp of Israel. It wasn't that these people were awful sinners, but it did remind people the affects of sin in the world and God wanted them to walk in holiness since they were going into the Promise Land. And the reality is, all have sinned and fallen short of the standard of God, which is perfection. Holiness is what we should strive for, not for salvation but out of love and knowing that is what is best for our lives; it is what God desires of us!

VERSES 3-4

1. It did not matter if you were a male or female, if you had any of these things you needed to be removed from the camp until you were ceremonially clean!

VERSES 5-7

1. It seems here that God is speaking of sinning against another and that he needs to make restitution plus 20% to the person.

VERSE 8

1. If the person who was wronged is not around and he has no close relatives, then it would go to the Lord.

VERSES 9-10

1. I think the focus in the verses we have read already dealt with, our fellowship with God and how sin will break that fellowship until we repent and get right with Him. You see, God's desire here is that as they gave an offering to the Lord, like the peace offering, they would also partake of this offering with the Lord and no one could take that away.

VERSES 11-14

1. Jealousy, especially in marriage is destructive. Here a husband has a suspicion that his wife cheated on him, committed adultery, but he is not sure. This may seem kind of strange but I think Poole nails it when he wrote, "This law was given partly to deter wives from adulterous practices, and partly to secure wives against the rage of their hard-hearted husbands, who otherwise might upon mere suspicions destroy them, or at least put them away."

VERSE 15

1. The husband would bring to the priest a grain offering without oil or frankincense because there was nothing sweet about this situation.

VERSES 16-28

1. Kind of a strange ceremony and apart from the Lord dealing with this in a supernatural way, nothing would happen except maybe an upset stomach from drinking the water with the dust and scrapings of her words, her possible sin. You see, the husband didn't know if his wife cheated but the Lord does and He will make it known. If she is not guilty, nothing would happen and her marriage would be restored, he was wrong. But if she was guilty, then she would be barren, her thigh would rot and her belly swelled, not a pretty picture. Not only would her sin be found out because nothing is hidden from the Lord, but she would be an object lesson for others that even if your sin is done in secret, God will make it known! It truly is not for destruction, but God wants to restore life and sin will hamper that.

VERSES 29-31

1. This ceremony was meant to resolve this issue of jealousy so that the sin would be made known or her faithfulness would be made known. Today, like back then, adultery destroys lives but in Christ there can be healing brought to this situation. You see, God is in the business of healing relationships, restoring lives and that goes beyond adultery! Folks, I am thankful for that. And as hard as it is to forgive people, the hurts they have brought into our lives, Paul reminds us, **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”** Ephesians 4:30-32. Thus, walk in holiness unto the Lord and don't let the spirit of jealousy destroy you and your relationships!