

Numbers 1

Census Lessons in the Wilderness

Friday, February 16, 2024 - Read Numbers 1

Questions from the Scripture text: Who spoke to whom, where (v1)? When? What did He command him to take? Of whom (v2)? In what way (v3-4)? Which elders did the Lord select to oversee the census (v5-16)? How closely is this followed in v17-19? How many were there from Reuben (v20-21)? From Simeon (v22-23)? From Gad (v24-25)? From Judah (v26-27)? From Issachar (v28-29)? From Zebulun (v30-31)? From Ephraim (v32-33)? From Manasseh (v34-35)? From Benjamin (v36-37)? From Dan (v38-39)? From Asher (v40-41)? From Naphtali (v42-43)? How many in total (v44-46)? Who were not numbered (v47)? Why not (v48-49)? To what were they appointed (v50-51)? What if someone else drew near to do this work (end of v51)? Who were to pitch where in v52? But where were the Levites to camp (v53)? What determined all of this (v54)?

What can we learn from a census? Numbers 1 prepares us for the evening sermon on the Lord's Day. In these fifty-four verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **the Lord numbered His people to teach them many things about their upcoming time in the wilderness, which things we also need to learn.**

God's rule over His people. YHWH commands a census. This is something that a king did in order to determine how much he might raise in taxes, or how many servants he could enlist in a building project, or how many soldiers for a war. In this case, it is in the form of an army (v3), but just now our point is to see that when the Lord numbers His people in this way, He is taking the place of a King. This is the King Whom Israel would one day reject (cf. 1Sam 8:7).

God's faithfulness to His promises. When Israel came down to Egypt, they numbered seventy (cf. Gen 46:26-27). Now, the number of men above the age of 20 were 603,350, without including the Levites. This many households, in the middle of a baby boom that frightened Pharaoh, puts the total number at a minimum of two million, with as many as six million total people. How faithful the Lord has been to multiply His people (cf. Gen 32:12)!

God's testing His people's faith. Those who wring their hands over purported (preposterous!) overpopulation today would surely have been stressing out at Sinai. We can only imagine the logistical (or judicial, societal, etc.) challenges that would arise among such a numerous people in the wilderness. He had given them manna and provided water. But was this sustainable? That depends upon whom you think does the sustaining. The Lord had brought His people out. This implied that the Lord would take care of them. He had multiplied them like this, in part, so that they could perceive that He was promising marvelous and miraculous provision! And He was testing their faith; would they trust in Him to work wonders?

God's people's responsibility. By numbering them and mustering them according to armies, the Lord was teaching Israel that they would have to fight for the promised land. Surely, He would deliver their enemies into their hands, as He had already done with the Amalekites in Rephidim (cf. Ex 17:8-16). But they would be required to fight in taking Canaan, just as they had at that time. God's people know that He works all things together for their good. But He tells us to fight, wrestle, run, and kill. And He refers to means of His grace as "armor" (cf. 6:11). He reminded His people of their responsibility then, and this reminds us that He teaches us our responsibilities throughout the Scripture. To him who knows the good that he ought to do, and does not do it, that is sin (cf. Ja 4:17).

God's order among God's people. The Lord divided them according to tribes. The Lord set a head over each tribe, in this case assigning each leader by name (v5-16). The Lord appointed the Levites to the tabernacle (v47-53), which itself was a lifesaving mission (v53). v54 describes how it should be in the Lord's church. His church, His order, His way. Spiritual oversight by shepherding elders. Oversight of temporal ministry by deacons. Recognizing whom He has called to each office by His Word. The Lord insists upon His order among His people. In a book in which there is going to be much rebellion, let churches see to it, by God's grace, that they not be outclassed by the Israel of Num 1:54.

In what area of your life do you most need to remember that you are the Lord's possession and servant? How has the Lord most of all shown you His faithfulness (hint: roughly two thousand years ago)? How else has the Lord demonstrated His faithfulness to you? What situation in your life seems impossible? How does this test your faith? In what area of life have you been most tempted to shrink from your responsibility? What is God's order for your home? For your church? Where do you, personally, fit into that?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You for Your faithfulness to gather each and every one of Your people to Yourself. Grant to us to rejoice to submit to You, to depend upon You, and to serve You, we ask through Christ, Amen!

Suggested songs: ARP116B "I Still Believed" or TPH61B "O Hear My Urgent Cry"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. **PLEASE BE AWARE** of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Numbers chapter one. These are the words of God. Now, you always spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai in the Tabernacle of meeting.

On the first day of the second month and the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt saying, Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel by their families by their fathers houses according to the number of names every male individually from 20 years old and above All who are able to go to war in Israel?

You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. And with you, there shall be a man from every tribe, each one, the head of his father's house. These are the names of the men who shall stand with you. From Reuben Elizaur, the son of Shadow you were From Simeon, shalomiel the son of zaroshidai.

From Judah Nation, the son of a minidab. From issachar nathanel, the son of Zuar. From zebulun eliab, the son of Halon. From the sons of Joseph, from Ephraim, Eli Sharma, the son of amihood. From Manasseh, gamalio the son of pedazor. From Benjamin, avidam, the son of garioni. From then he is there.

The son of Amisha died? From Asher, pagiel the son of okran. From Gad Aliasaff the son of duel. From naftali. A Hera the son of a n. These were chosen from the congregation leaders of their father's tribes heads of the divisions in Israel. Then Moses and Aaron took these men who had been mentioned by name.

And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month. And they recited their ancestry by families by their father's houses. According to the number of names from 20 years old and above each one individually. As Yahweh commanded Moses. So he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai.

Now the children of Riven Ezra's, oldest son, their genealogies by their families, by their father's house according to the number of names every male individually from 20 years old, and above All who are able to go to war those? Who numbered were numbered of the tribe of Reuben where 46 500 From the children of Simeon.

Their genealogies by their families, by their father's house. Of those who are numbered according to the number of names every male individually from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war. Those who are numbered of the tribe of Simeon were 59, 300. From the children of God, their genealogies, by their families, by their father's house.

According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war. Those who were numbered of the tribe of Gad were 45, 650. From the children of Judah, their genealogies by their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war, those who were numbered of the tribe of Judah.

We're 74. 600. From the children of issachar their genealogies, by their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old and above all, who are able to go to war. Those who were numbered of the tribe of issachar were 54 400. From the children of Zebula their genealogies, by their families,

by their father's house.

According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war. Those who were numbered of the tribe of Zebulun, were 57,400. From the sons of Joseph, the children of Ephraim their genealogies by their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who were able to go to war.

Those who are numbered of the tribe of Ephraim. Were forty thousand five hundred. From the children of Manasseh, their genealogies, by their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old and above all who were able to go to war those who were numbered to the tribe of Manasseh.

32,200. From the children of Benjamin their genealogies, by their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war. Those were numbered of the tribe of Benjamin were 35,400. From the children of Dan their genealogies.

By their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war. Those who were numbered of the tribe of Dan were 62,700? From the children of Asher, their genealogies by their families, by their father's house.

According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war. Those were numbered of the tribe of Asher were 41,500. From the children of Naftali. Their genealogies by their families, by their father's house. According to the number of names from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war, those who are numbered to the tribe of Naftali.

Were 53,400. These are the ones who are numbered, Moses and Aaron numbered with the leaders of Israel. 12 men. Each one representing his father's house. So all who are numbered of the children of Israel by their father's house from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war in Israel, all who are numbered were six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty.

But the Levites were not numbered among them by their father's tribe. For y'all, I had spoken to Moses saying, only the tribe of Levi. You shall not number. Nor take a census of them among the children of Israel. But you saw a point the Levites over the Tabernacle of the testimony over all its furnishings and over all things that belong to it, they shall carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings.

They shall attend to it and camp around the Tabernacle. And when the Tabernacles go forward, the Levites shall take it down. When the Tabernacles to be set up, the Levite shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp. Everyone by his own standard.

According to their armies. But the Levites shall camp around the Tabernacle, the testimony that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel. And the Levites shall keep charge of the Tabernacle of the testimony. Thus, the children of Israel did according to all that Yahweh commanded Moses.

So, they did. So, for the reading of God's inspired, and And it. In English, this book comes to us by the name Numbers. Uh, its Hebrew name is actually much more descriptive. Of the content of the book and comes from the first line. Uh, of the book it is called in Hebrew in the wilderness.

And, even in this census that uh, the book starts with it, establishes for Israel. Uh, some truths about the Lord and about themselves. That they are actually going to sin against over and over again for the rest of the book. And so it's helpful to us to see the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and starting the book in this way, so that we can see those truths so that we can recognize our need to learn those truths.

Not just in the mind, but in the heart. Asking the spirit who calls the words to be written upon the page to cause the words to be written upon our hearts, the truth of God's word to be written upon our hearts. So that we will take good warning. As we go through the book.

The things that came upon them in the wilderness. Uh, all these things came upon them, says, First Corinthians 10, but they were written down for our instruction. And so it is especially in that context where the Apostle is teaching in First Corinthians 10, let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall.

And so praise God by Grace. We stand even. Also, as in another passage, the one that we heard Wednesday evening. In the prayer meeting yesterday evening in the prayer meeting sermon and Romans 11. Um, by faith you stand. Do not be haughty. Do not be arrogant.

And so we do stand by grace through faith in Christ. And therefore, we still need to take heed according to this book. Well, the first thing that they learn or the first lesson in this census is that God rules over his people. Only the one who is The Sovereign of a Nation can demand that everyone must be counted and is ordinarily done in order to go to war.

So that they may know how many soldiers they have, which is what's described here. Uh, everyone from 20 years old, and above all, who are able to go to war in Israel. And even that language, that was repeated throughout the chapter. Begins in verse 3. Where it describes them as being numbered by their hosts, or by their armies.

Uh, the Lord describes himself as Yahweh of hosts. Referring especially to Angel armies. Uh, but also reminding that all armies, all multitudes all creatures belonged to him. Uh, you remember that? Jesus was born during the census. Uh, that was ordered by Caesar Augustus. And even our own Nation. Every 10 years asserts its sovereignty over us.

By taking a census. As well. And so the first thing we see is that God rules, adverse people. The second thing we see, is that God's faithfulness that God is faithful to his promises. There are significantly more. Uh, then 75 people here. Uh, there were 70 who had gone down to Egypt 75 in all including The family of Joseph and A Simeon who was held in the place of Benjamin.

Uh, and now these 75 have become. 603,350 fighting men. A minimum of 2 million. Considering the baby boom, that had threatened the Pharaoh possibly, as many as 6 million, but a minimum of 2 million people. God is faithful to his promises. He said he would multiply Abraham. Uh, and he said he would multiply Isaac.

And he said very specifically that he would multiply Jacob Israel. In Genesis 32 verse 12, And he has, Done it. Uh, not only then is God faithful to his promises but he is testing his people's. As we said a few minutes ago, the name of the book in Hebrew is in the wilderness.

Well, they have two million people. To feed to clothe. To take care of sanitation. To keep order among. God who brought them out is going to take care of them? God, who multiplied them is going to take care of them but he is going to have to do. So in a way that is beyond their understanding. We've already seen the manna and streams in the desert.

Victory over the Midianites even before they got to Sinai. By the time they finish. They will have. Uh, sandals. That have been worn walking through the desert for 40 years. That have not worn out. God is testing his people's. Um, it's kind of preposterous. Uh, Uh, for us to think about how there are so many in the world who not seeing man as precious being made in the image of God.

And Therefore, having this duty to be fruitful and to multiplying, and to fill the Earth with its creator's image. Uh, and there are many then who don't have the biblical world view. And they think that the world is overpopulated that it's going to run out of resources. Um, even some who just have A common Grace modicum of Common Sense, like Uh, one famous scientist who is doing more to make Mars colonizable, Uh, than almost anyone else or any Nation on Earth.

He laughs at the idea that we're running out of resources and now there's plenty of resources. Man is not a problem. Uh, but As far as population versus resources, The Israelite Camp had a population problem. But it had a promised solution. God is faithful to his promises and he is testing his people's Faith.

And so we too must do whatever God has said to do. And trust him. That he Will keep his promises. Now. Is the one who keeps his promises and he works by his power. Uh, but also note here, that God is teaching his people that they Must be responsible.

That they are going to have to participate. Uh, Independence upon him but he calls them armies. And he says over and over and over throughout the whole chapter, they are going to go to war. And so they ought to be not just numbering but preparing and planning and training.

Thinking preparing. To serve God. Uh, just because we depend upon God and we trust him. Bring about the results that he has, promised does not mean that we are to be passive or foolish. Or unprepared. God has appointed means and we are to use them. We often think of that, in terms of the means of Grace, That you can't say well I'm trusting God to grow me and so I don't need to read my Bible or pray or be a member of a faithful church or attend Faithfully at the public worship and the prayer meetings.

I'm trusting God to grow me. Trusting God to grow. You means using the means by which he grows you. And you can't say, well, I would not, I don't care to learn a trade or get an education. And I am not going to work because I'm trusting God to feed me.

No, he's appointed work as a means by which you get to participate in the eating and he commands, he who will not work, he shall not eat. And so he was teaching the Israelites even right here at the outset reminding them. They are going to have to go to war.

And it's going to be a fierce war indeed if God has provided them over 600 000 Warriors. They should be prepared. To do. Great battle. And so we see. Uh, God's rule over his people, his faithfulness to his promises, his testing our faith, whether we trust that he is going to be able to keep those promises even against such conditions as he brings us through in his Providence, we see God's people's responsibility.

And then we see. Uh, God's order among his people. He divides them according to tribes. He names by name. The head over each tribe. He is the one who selects those who are in Authority. Now, we know this Uh, in the doctrine of God's Providence. Obvious reality that he calls himself, I am.

The off way. And everything else depends upon him. And so, of course, he is, the one who is selected whoever is going to be in authority. And that is one of the reasons that we submit. Uh, to Authority. But, Within his church and don't forget. Israel is also a church.

These are households and they are being called a congregation. Verse 16, those who are chosen from the congregation. And verse. Two, take a census of all the congregation. That there is a special way in which We are to see. Those who are in Authority as specifically called by God called even by name.

And so, Those who had been named he says,

In verse 17, then Moses and Aaron took these men who had been mentioned by name And that is a great encouragement to us. As we still remember the responsibility part we follow acts 6. Follow first Timothy 3 and we follow Titus 1. And we learn what? Uh, what the character of a deacon should be, and what the character of an elder should be and we follow God's word.

But at the end of the day, we do so with an awareness that God is calling by name. Those whom he sets properly as officers in his church, Finally, we see our greatest danger and our greatest danger is not the enemies that are in this world. Our greatest danger is God himself.

God devoted an entire tribe of Israel. Um, to keeping them from being put to death by coming near to the Tabernacle, And keeping them from coming under wrath. Uh, the Levites. Uh, had the most important. Uh, part in protecting Israel. Because they were appointed by God not to protect them from Canaanites.

But to protect them from the Living. God, whose wrath Burns hot against sin. And had provided them provided his people, a means by which, to have him dwell in the midst of them. And that means, of course is his son, our Lord Jesus. The true reality of which the Tabernacle and the priesthood and the sacrifices were all shadows and copies.

So bless God, Jesus is our great warrior. Who has delivered us from God's Wrath and protected us from our infinitely, greater danger, and who will also defeat all of his and our enemies. Free is not just a priest. But also a king. All of these wonderful lessons. If they would have just, Learned what the Lord taught them in the census and applied.

It numbers would not be full of as many helpful warnings for us. Of what falling looks like. So may the Lord blessed to us. The knowledge of these things and may his Spirit. Shape. Uh, according to Christ sanctified in Christ, throughout our studies through this book, Let's pray. Thank you.

Father that Uh, do own us. And that you have made promises that are great and to which you are abundantly faithful. Even as you multiplied, the people. Thank you for the reminder that you are God. And that you intentionally do things. That seem to us to be impossible. So that we will be forced to trust you.

And not to trust whether we think things are possible. We thank you for. Uh, giving Your people, the role that they had, Particularly these men, 20 years old and upward. Who still were able to make war? And we thank you that you have given to us so much good instruction in your word.

Uh, and even the occasions of your Providence. That we might learn from your word how to respond to them. And know that you are giving us a part give us. We pray to be responsible and diligent and zealous. Uh, and using all of the means that you have appointed.

For all of the good that you do for us and give us We thank you that you are the one. Arranges everything as you want. Uh, in the body and in the congregations of your people. We thank you in particular for our own Elders. And the deacons that we pray that you would be giving us and that you have called them by name.

And that we may therefore Have great hope for The fruitfulness of their Ministry. And may humbly. Submit ourselves under their Ministry. Knowing that you are the one. He has put them in those positions. But we thank you, most of all that you have given us your son. Our Lord Jesus.

To be our great, high priest, after the order of Melchizedek, And that he indeed has saved us from your wrath. And we pray that you would make us to see sin and guilt a draft as our greatest danger in life. That we would not fear them, who can only kill the body.

But that we would fear you after having killed the body, Um, concat wood, well cast body and soul into hell. Of all who are outside of Christ. And so we pray. Lord that you would write all of these lessons upon our hearts.

Be glorified O, Lord in all the good that you do. For us, and our family, and our household as your people in Jesus, in his name, we ask it. Amen.