NUMBERS

Chapter 1

*The Census*

**The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: 2 “Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. 3 You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army. 4 One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you. 5 These are the names of the men who are to assist you:**

**from Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur;**

**6 from Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai;**

**7 from Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab;**

**8 from Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar;**

**9 from Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon;**

**10 from the sons of Joseph:**

**from Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud;**

**from Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur;**

**11 from Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni;**

**12 from Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai;**

**13 from Asher, Pagiel son of Ocran;**

**14 from Gad, Eliasaph son of Deuel;**

**15 from Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan.”**

**16 These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes.**

**They were the heads of the clans of Israel. 17 Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been given, 18 and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month. The people indicated their ancestry by their clans and families, and the men twenty years old or more were listed by name, one by one, 19 as the Lord commanded Moses. And so he counted them in the Desert of Sinai:**

**20 From the descendants of Reuben the firstborn son of Israel:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, one by one, according to the records of their clans and families. 21 The number from the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.**

**22 From the descendants of Simeon:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were counted and listed by name, one by one, according to the records of their clans and families. 23 The number from the tribe of Simeon was 59,300.**

**24 From the descendants of Gad:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 25 The number from the tribe of Gad was 45,650.**

**26 From the descendants of Judah:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 27 The number from the tribe of Judah was 74,600.**

**28 From the descendants of Issachar:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 29 The number from the tribe of Issachar was 54,400.**

**30 From the descendants of Zebulun:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 31 The number from the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400.**

**32 From the sons of Joseph:**

**From the descendants of Ephraim:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 33 The number from the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500.**

**34 From the descendants of Manasseh:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 35 The number from the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.**

**36 From the descendants of Benjamin:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 37 The number from the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.**

**38 From the descendants of Dan:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 39 The number from the tribe of Dan was 62,700.**

**40 From the descendants of Asher:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 41 The number from the tribe of Asher was 41,500.**

**42 From the descendants of Naphtali:**

**All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families. 43 The number from the tribe of Naphtali was 53,400.**

**44 These were the men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family. 45 All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel’s army were counted according to their families. 46 The total number was 603,550.**

**47 The families of the tribe of Levi, however, were not counted along with the others. 48 The Lord had said to Moses: 49 “You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. 50 Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony—over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. 51 Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death. 52 The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. 53 The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the Testimony so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”**

**54 The Israelites did all this just as the Lord commanded Moses.**

**1:1** *The Lord spoke to Moses.* One of the most pervasive emphases in Numbers is the fact that the Lord spoke to Moses and through Moses to Israel. From the opening words to the closing words (36:13), this is stated over 150 times and in more than 20 ways. The Lord’s use of Moses as his prophet is described in 12:6–8. One of the Hebrew names for the book is *wayedabber* (“And he [the Lord] spoke”), from the first word in the Hebrew text. (CSB)

*Tent of Meeting.* The tabernacle. (CSB)

*Desert of Sinai.* The more common Hebrew name for Numbers is *bemidbar* (“in the desert”), the fifth word in the Hebrew text. The events of Numbers cover a period of 38 years and nine or ten months, i.e., the period of Israel’s desert wanderings. (CSB)

*first day … second month … second year.* Thirteen months after the exodus, Numbers begins. Israel had spent the previous year in the region of Mount Sinai receiving the law and erecting the tabernacle. Now she was to be mustered as a military force for an orderly march. Dating events from the exodus (for another example see 1Ki 6:1) is similar to the Christian practice of dating years in reference to the incarnation of Christ (b.c. and a.d.). The exodus was God’s great act of deliverance of his people from bondage. (CSB)

**1:2** *Take*. The Hebrew for this word is plural, indicating that Moses and Aaron were to complete this task together (see v. 3, “You and Aaron”), but the primary responsibility lay with Moses. (CSB)

*census.* Its main purpose was to form a military roster, not a social, political or taxing document. (CSB)

**1:3** *able to serve in the army.* Refers to the principal military purpose of the census. The phrase occurs 14 times in ch. 1 and again in 26:2. (CSB)

**1:4** *One man from each tribe.* By having a representative from each tribe assist Moses and Aaron, the count would be regarded as legitimate by all. (CSB)

**1:5–16** The names of these men occur again in chs. 2; 7; 10. Most contain within them a reference to the name of God. Levi is not represented in the list (see vv. 47–53). (CSB)

**1:19** *And so he counted them in the Desert of Sinai.* A summary statement; vv. 20–43 provide the details. (CSB)

**1:20–43** For each tribe there are two verses in repetitive formulaic structure, giving: (1) the name of the tribe, (2) the specifics of those numbered, (3) the name of the tribe again and (4) the total count for that tribe. The numbers for each tribe are rounded off to the hundred (but Gad to the 50, v. 25). The same numbers are given for each tribe in ch. 2, where there are four triads of tribes. A peculiarity in the numbers that leads some to believe that they are symbolic is that the hundreds are grouped between 200 and 700. Also, various speculations have arisen regarding the meaning of the Hebrew word for “thousand” (see Introduction: Special Problem). In this chapter, the word has been used to mean 1,000 in order for the totals to be achieved. (CSB)

**1:32–35** Because the descendants of Levi were excluded from the census (see note on v. 47), the descendants of Joseph are listed according to the families of his two sons, Ephraim (vv. 32–33) and Manasseh (vv. 34–35). In this way the traditional tribal number of 12 is maintained, and Joseph is given the “double portion” of the ranking heir (cf. Ge 49:22–26; Dt 33:13–17; 2Ki 2:9). (CSB)

**1:46** *603,550.* Except for Joshua and Caleb, all these died in the desert. The mathematics of these numbers is accurate and complex. It is complex in that the totals are reached in two ways: (1) a linear listing of 12 units (vv. 20–43), with the total given (v. 46); (2) four sets of triads, each with a subtotal, and then the grand total (2:3–32). These figures are also consistent with those in Ex 12:37; 38:26. This large number of men conscripted for the army suggests a population for the entire community in excess of 2,000,000 (see Introduction: Special Problem). Ex 1:7 describes the remarkable growth of the Hebrew people in Egypt during the 400-year sojourn. They had become so numerous that they were regarded as a grave threat to the security of Egypt (Ex 1:9–10, 20). Israel’s amazing growth from the 70 who entered Egypt (Ex 1:5) was an evidence of God’s great blessing and his faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham (Ge 12:2; 15:5; 17:4–6; 22:17). (CSB)

**1:47** Because of their special tasks, the Levites were excluded from this military count. They too had to perform service to the Lord, but they were to be engaged in the ceremonies and maintenance of the tabernacle (see note on vv. 32–35). (CSB)

**1:50** *Testimony.* The Ten Commandments written on stone tablets (see Ex 31:18; 32:15; 34:29), which were placed in the ark (Ex 25:16, 21; 40:20), leading to the phrase the “ark of the Testimony” (Ex 25:22; 26:33, 34). (CSB)

**1:51** *Anyone else.* The Hebrew for this phrase is often translated “stranger,” “alien” or “foreigner” (e.g., Isa 1:7; Hos 7:9). Thus a non-Levite Israelite was considered an alien to the religious duties of the tabernacle (see Ex 29:33; 30:33; Lev 22:12). (CSB)

*death.* See 3:10, 38; 18:7; cf. 16:31–33; 1Sa 6:19. (CSB)

**1:53** *their tents around the tabernacle.* See 3:21–38. (CSB)

*wrath.* The Levites formed a protective hedge against trespassing by the non-Levites to keep them from experiencing divine wrath. (CSB)

**1:54** *as the Lord commanded Moses.* In view of Israel’s great disobedience in the later chapters of Numbers, these words of initial compliance have a special poignancy. (CSB)