



Numbers 1-5

Tape #7044
Numbers 1-5
By Chuck Smith

CHAPTER 1

Let's get to the book of Numbers. As you can see, I'm not too anxious about getting into this thing, because censuses never did turn me on. And yet there are some interesting things that I think that we need to take note of here in the book of Numbers.

The LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt.

So, they have stayed in the area of Sinai for two years and one month at this point. In the second year they came out of Egypt. They came out in the first month, so this is the second month of the second year. So, two years now in the area around Sinai and the Lord commands him to take a census. Now, this is interesting in the light of the fact that later on David got into trouble for taking a census. Here Moses is ordered to take a census and the census is to be of the men who are over twenty years of age. Those men who would be able to go to war.

And so, they first of all chose men from each of the tribes to head up the census for that particular tribe. And so, it means from verses five through fifteen, the various tribes and those men who were chosen to represent that tribe, as far as taking of the census.

And then these men gathered together and they resided their ancestry by families, by their father's houses, according to the number of names from twenty years old and above, each one individually.

That must have been one boring day as the representative of the tribe of Reuben got up and named all of the families of Reuben and the numbers within that family. And then each representative of the tribes in turn standing up giving the names and the numbers and then the total numbers of that tribe. And so, rather then, well we'll just sort of take the total number which we find interesting.

Now, the census was taken again some thirty eight years later just before they went into the promised land. After the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the second census was taken. And it is very interesting to compare that figure of the first census with the second census.

One thing we note is that during this forty years of wandering in the wilderness they had, more or less, achieved a zero population growth. The population at the end of the forty years was basically the same as it was the beginning of the forty years. Which speaks of the rigor and the hardship of that wandering in the wilderness.

Of course, as we get into the book of Numbers, they're going to find out that many times as they murmured or complained against the Lord, they were plagued by the Lord, they were smitten. A lot of catastrophes befell them which wiped out a lot of the people and so it accounts for the zero population growth.

Think of how much the population has grown in the United States in the last forty years. As you look at the census figures from 1940 to 1980 we see that there has been quite an expansion of the population. A zero population growth is a hard thing to attain, and yet, the rigor's of the wilderness experience: that's what happened.

Now, the tribe of Reuben, at the first census: there were forty six thousand five hundred, verse twenty one.

In the twenty sixth chapter, at the second census, there was only 43,730. So, a population drop in the tribe of Reuben, of the adult men, of almost three thousand. Close to three thousand dropped in the tribe of Reuben.

The tribe of Simeon, there were 59, 300.

It really was decimated. Less than half of that were left in the tribe of Simeon. Of the second census there was only 22, 200. So, the tribe of Simeon was really decimated during the wilderness wanderings.

The tribe of Gad, there were 45, 650 men above the age of twenty years of age who were able to go to war. And so, at the end of that period of time there was only 40, 500. A drop of about five thousand in the drop of Gad. From, at this census, there were 74, 600, verse 27. But at the end of the forty years had actually proliferated and they had 76, 500. An increase of almost two thousand men, from 74, 000 to 76, 000. The tribe of Issachar, in verse 29, 54, 400. But they really multiplied in the wilderness, maybe they didn't have TV 64, 300 at the end of the forty years. The tribe of Zebulun grew from 57, 400 to 60, 500. So, an increase of 3, 100. The tribe of Ephraim, reduces from 40, 500 to 32, 500. So, a drop of 8000. The tribe of Manasseh grew 20,000. From 32, 200 to 52, 700. Benjamin grew from 35, 400 to 45, 600. 10, 200 increase. Tribe of Dan, from 62, 700 grew to 64, 400. So a little over a thousand. And so: the tribe of Asher grew from 41, 500 to 53, 400. The tribe of Naphtali, verse 43, from 53,00 it was reduced to 45, 400. So, a drop of 8000 in Naphtali. Now: At the beginning of the wilderness experience there were six hundred and three thousand five hundred.

At the end of the wilderness experience there was six hundred one thousand seven hundred and thirty. So, there was a drop in population during the forty years of wilderness wandering of approximately 1200 men. Which isn't, it's pretty close to a zero population. A drop of about 1200 over the forty year period.

Now, we do remember that all of these that were numbered here, twenty years old and above; all of these that were numbered here only two of them were allowed to go into the land, Joshua and Caleb. The two spies that brought back the good report God allowed them to go in the land. Of all of those who were twenty the Lord said they will roam in the wilderness until they die and only Joshua and Caleb, above twenty, will be allowed to go into the land of promise.

So, this whole census here, six hundred thousand men six hundred three thousand, perished in the wilderness as God raised up a new generation in that forty year period of time to go into the land.

Imagine say, deciding that we're going to all migrate from here, let's say to Blithe Colorado River. We want to colonate that area around the Colorado River and so we decide to take off from here, get buses out of your mind and cars and vans and motor homes. I mean we're going to walk and we're going to camp

out and we're going to survive off the desert until we get to Blithe. And though the distance from here to Blithe is about the same distance that they went to get to the land of promise they were wandering in that wilderness for forty years and imagine doing that with three hundred people.

Imagine all the logistics involved in this thing. I mean, unless the Lord was with them and unless the Lord had provided the manna and the water and all they would have surely perished. They were learning in this period to trust in God for their survival. I would imagine that these were probably the best and the healthiest in the nation. How wonderful it is when we are consciously depending upon God for our survival.

Now, we do not always depend upon God for our survival. David said, *"If it were not for the Lord, let all of Israel now say; if it were not for the Lord, then we would have been totally consumed by our enemies."* "If it weren't for the Lord, we would all be wiped out." But we're not always aware of that. You see, we are so often looking at our own abilities, and our own genius, and our own wisdom, and our own conniving; and always saying, "Well, I've learned to get along; and I can do this, and I can do that." And we so often are attributing our survival to something other than God's preservation. It is good when we realize, when we are conscious of the fact, "I am dependent upon God." And to be consciously dependent upon God is a very healthy state spiritually.

And so, these people were in a healthy state in that they knew that God was necessary for their survival, and without His help, they were not going to make it.

Now: The tribe of Levi was not numbered in this census because the tribe of Levi were not to go to war. Their primary duty was to take care of the things of the tabernacle and they were to camp immediately around the tabernacle.

CHAPTER 2

Now, in the second chapter God sets out the camp of Israel and it is good.

Now, let me give you a little assignment, and I think that you will find this extremely beneficial in helping you just sort of to get the picture. You want special credit for the course? Draw out a diagram of the camp of Israel. The tabernacle is here in center of the camp. And to the East you have the three tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. And when they get ready to move these are the first to move out. So God says, "Okay, time to move: move out troops." Well Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun are the first to roll up their tents and to get things ready; and they start moving first. First to move out. And then on the South side of the camp, you've got Reuben, and Simeon, and Gad; and they are the second to move out. And then on the West side of the camp you have the forces of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. They're the third group to move out. And then over here on the North side, you have Dan, and Asher, and Naphtali. They're the forth group; and then comes the tabernacle with the Levites.

Now draw on your diagram the tabernacle in the center of the camp and then draw around the camp those tribes. And for special credit, put the population of the tribes and then the total population of each groupings of three. Twelve tribes, [really thirteen if you count the tribe of Levi,] but the three on each side around the tabernacle: and you get the picture of how they moved, the orderliness, and how God set the whole thing out in order. And that to me is always interesting to observe.

Now, the thing to really note is that the tabernacle was in the center of the camp. By which, God was declaring, the strength of the nation is when God is at the heart, or the center of national life. Oh, I've thought how often: it would be so glorious if we could live in a community where God was the center of the community. Where we were all conscious of the fact of the centrality of God within our lives, within our

community.

So, as they would pitch their tents around the tabernacle, they would always pitch the tent door facing the tabernacle. So when you came out of your tent in the morning, the first thing that you saw was the smoke of the sacrifice, the morning sacrifice, ascending up to God; and it gave you that consciousness that God is in the midst of His people. God is in the midst of the nation. I love that! I think that's absolutely beautiful, to have this consciousness. God is in the midst of His people. He dwells in the center of the nation. And as long as that consciousness exists, the nation is strong; preserved by God.

Now, as you look at these tribes, we do get the total number of each tribe given to us, that is, of the three tribes.

With the tribe of Judah over here on the East side, verse 9: They totaled out the fellows that could fight. *They totaled out at 186, 400. On the south side over here, with Reuben and Simeon and Gad their total number was 151, 450. And then over there on the west side with Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin they had 108, 100. And then on this north side with Dan Asher and Naphtali a total of 157, 600.*

And so that's how the camp was set up. But then closest and immediately around the tabernacle itself was the tribe of Levi.

CHAPTER 3

So, in chapter 3, verse 2:

These are the names of the sons of Aaron, Nadab, who was his first born, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Now, Nadab and Abihu were wiped out. They died before the Lord the day that the tabernacle was inaugurated. The worship was inaugurated when they offered the strange fire before the Lord -- And so: The tribe of Levi was commissioned to attend to the needs of the whole congregation before the whole tabernacle of meeting to do the work of the ministry within the tabernacle.

And God declares in verse 12: that,

He has taken the Levites for Himself from among the children of Israel instead of every first born who opens the womb among the children of Israel -- Therefore the Levites are mine.

Now, you remember when the final plague came upon the Egyptians, the death of the first born, how that when the blood was put upon their door posts the first born were not slain. But in all of Egypt, in all the houses of Egypt, even to the Pharaoh's house where there was not protection of the blood, the first born was slain that night in Egypt. That night that God passed through the land of Egypt; wiped out the first born.

Now, inasmuch, as the first born were not wiped out in camp of Israel God said:

The first born really belonged to me. From now on the first born is mine.

If you want to keep your first born son, or daughter, you've got to actually redeem them from the Lord. They belong to Him. So you've got to buy them back from the Lord; the first are His. That's sort of the way God always works: the first are His. He comes in for the first part.

So, God had said *the first born always belongs to me.* Well, now God is saying, *instead of the first*

born the whole tribe of Levi is mine. And I am going to take the tribe of Levi as mine instead of the first born of the land.

So, God had them, interestingly enough, number then those of the tribe of Levi; and they also numbered the first born to make sure God wasn't getting short changed; and it turned out that He was. That there were a few more first born then there were in the tribe of Levi. So, we'll get to that in a moment. Let's go ahead and sort of plod through it.

The first family of the Levites that was numbered was the family of Gershon, verse 21. And of the family of Gershon they were 7, 500 males from thirty years old to fifty years old.

Now, with the Levites, you could not enter the priesthood until you were thirty years old. That basically is why Jesus didn't begin his public ministry until he was thirty years of age. You could not enter into the priesthood, the work of the priesthood, until you were thirty. And when you were fifty, then you were retired from it.

Now, the work of the priests was not all involved worship. Much of this was involved in just being porters, as they would carry the tabernacle from place to place.

Now, the tribe of Gershon was on the west side of the tabernacle. Let's get it back up here again. Immediately next to the tabernacle, on the west side, was the tribe of Gershon. So close to it, God sort of kept a buffer between the tribes and the tabernacle: and the buffer were the tribe of Levi. And so they were camped close around. The family Gershon of Gershon, who was the Levite:

They were here on the west side 7, 500 males between the age's of thirty and fifty. Now their duties were when the tabernacle was to be moved they were to move the tent with it's coverings, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and the screen for the door of the court and the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle in the altar.

So, around the tabernacle here was this cloth fence, seven feet high, they had to carry that fence. They had to carry the tent that was over the tabernacle here and the screens that were out in front, and then here at the door of meetings. Next of all:

We have the family of the Kohathites and there were 8,600 and they camped on the south side. Immediately adjacent to the tabernacle here. And their duty included the ark. Carrying the ark of the covenant, the table, the lamp stand, the altar's and utensil's and the screen and all of the work relating to them. And then from the tribe of Merari, or the family of Merari, there were 6,200. They camped over here on the north side and they had to carry the boards of the tabernacle, the bars, the pillars, the sockets, the utensils and all of the work that related to them, the pillars of the court all around.

And all around this court were all of these posts that held up these hanging cloths, and they had to carry all the pegs, and the sockets, and the posts. And they were to camp over here on the south side.

And then out here in front, to the east side, Moses and Aaron, and their families. So, they are directly in front at the entrance of the tabernacle. Close around the Levites, and then further around the twelve tribes.

So, hopefully you got the picture: and if you'll take and draw it out on a piece of paper, it will help you tremendously to get this whole thing fixed in your mind.

Now, the census was to be taken of Kohath, chapter four. [Oh, this redemption, yes.] Now, they were to number all of the first born males of the children of Israel from a month old and above. So, they went through and took a census. "How many of you are first born," you know. "Male, from one month old and above?" And the Levites were to substitute for the first born.

So when Moses numbered the first born, verse 42, they came, in verse 43, to the names, and so forth; and there were 22, 273 first born. And so, there were not that many Levites. The total of Levites didn't come to that, and so there was a shortage there; and so they have to redeem, then, the difference. That is, they had to pay five shekels of silver per person for the difference in the numbers, and these were to be brought unto Aaron.

CHAPTER 4

Now, in the duties; actually the duties, fell upon those from thirty years old -- verse 3, -- to fifty.

This is the service of the sons of Kohath, relating to the most holy things.

When the camp prepares to journey, when God's cloud moved and it's time to move on, the pillar of fire began to move. And they prepared for the journey. Aaron and his sons would come into the tabernacle, and they would take down the covering veil, the veil that shielded from the holy of holies; and they would cover the ark of the covenant with this veil. And then they were to put a covering of badger skins over that, and they were to spread over the badger skins: a cloth of blue, and then they would insert the poles through those hoops. So that, when the Kohathites came in to carry the ark of the covenant, they never saw it. It was covered with the veil, which was covered with badger skins, and then was covered with this blue cloth so they never saw it. That work was done only by Aaron's family. The work of breaking down the holy of holies, covering the ark of the covenant.

And then also the table of show bread. They were to spread a blue cloth over it. They were to put the dishes, and the pans, and the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the show bread should be on it.

And they shall spread over the blue cloth a scarlet cloth, and they will cover the cover the same with the coverings of badger skins, and then insert the poles. And they shall take a blue cloth, and cover the lamp stands, --

So, actually, by the time even the priest came in, they did not see the furnishings of the tabernacle. They did not see the lamp stand, the table of show bread, the alter, the ark of the covenant. These were all covered by Aaron and his family. And so:

They are to cover, with the blue cloth, the lamp stand, with it's wick trimmers, the tray's, the oil vessels, with which they served it: And all of the utensils with the covering of badger skins, put it on a carrying beam.

And so these guys, you see, were porters. The Levites were porters: they would just come in and carry these things. They'd pick up these beams, pick up these poles, and they would carry the furnishings; that the tribe of Kohath could come and carry the furnishings of the tabernacle.

They also were to take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it: notice the colors: blue cloth, scarlet cloth, purple cloth. And they shall put on it all of the

implements, which they minister there, the fire pans, fork, shovels, and so forth. And so when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary, and all of the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go; then, the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them: but they shall not touch the holy things, lest they die.

Even the tribe of Kohath, the Levites, they couldn't touch it. You'd just pick up the poles; you don't touch the ark of the covenant. "You don't touch the table of show bread, you just pick up the poles." Now God was serious about this.

You remember when David went to bring back the ark of the covenant, after it had been taken by the Philistines, and carried to carry at Kirjath Jearim. David finally decided to bring it to Jerusalem, so he sent a bunch of guy's out and they came out and they were having these big dances, they put the thing on an ox cart and they were bringing it back to Jerusalem and the ox cart hit a rut and started to tip and Uzzah reached out to steady the thing and when he touched it he died.

David said, "Leave it right there. I don't want to bring that thing around me." And he went back to Jerusalem. And it was there at Kadesh Jearim where Uzzah touched it, and was killed. And so David went back: really shook up over this; and later on, when he decided again to bring it in, he looked up the records, and he realized that this isn't to be put on an ox cart. "You don't touch it, you carry it on poles and you don't mess with the ark of the covenant." And so David did it the second time the right way and brought the ark of the covenant back.

But even the priests themselves were not to touch it. It was to be touched only be Aaron and his sons as they would prepare the thing. They were sort of like-packers who would come to your house, and they pack things up; and then the movers come the next day - but they've got everything all packed and ready to go.

And so, when the Kohathites had come in, then Aaron and his sons said, "Okay you guys, you grab that pole, you grab this pole; you grab that board." And they would direct the guys in picking things up. But it was all done in a very orderly fashion.

And so Eleazar the son of Aaron had to take the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of the tabernacle, and all that was in it, -- that was his particular duty. Aaron and his sons, verse 19, were to go in, and appoint each of them, his service and his task: But they shall not go in and watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they died.

In other words, they don't go in until it's all prepared, and then Aaron and his sons say: they direct it, just like I said, "Okay you guys, pick up that; you guys pick up this." And they directed the whole activity.

The family of Gershon, they're all Levites; but the family of Gershon:

Their service in the tabernacle was to carry the curtains, verse 25, and the coverings, the badger skins that were over it, the screen of the door of the tabernacle of meeting. The screen of the door of the gate, in the outer court, the hangings of the outer court that are around the tabernacle, and the alter that was in the outer court, and the cords, and all the furnishings: they were to carry those. And their duties were to be under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron. He was to oversee what they were doing. And then the family of Merari, their duty is to carry the boards of the tabernacle, it's bars, it's pillars, it's sockets, --

And, of course, if you will remember back in Exodus, when they made the tabernacle, these boards were about 18 inches wide, a couple inches thick, set in sockets of silver, and so forth; with these poles that went through the silver hoops to hold them up right, and all. And so, these big boards, overlaid with gold, they were the things that the Merarites had to carry. So, it was quite a task: breaking the thing down, moving it on. Quite a job; but yet, it was organized so well. God had things just really organized to a T. And so Aaron and his sons, proficient in knowing how to do things, would direct the service. But these fellows, they were, really, porters you might say: laborers.

That's why, later on, some of the sons of Korah got together with some of the other guys, and they said, "You know, this isn't fair. We're Levites, and they just have us lugging this stuff around. We don't get to do any of the fun part: offering the sacrifices, and all. We have every much right to offer sacrifices as Aaron. The only reason why Moses chose Aaron was because he was his brother, and they got this little thing going." It was because they wanted to move into this other area of service, other than just carrying the stuff. "We want to get in on the sacrifice and the worship aspects."

And we will get to that as we move through here and find out what happened with Korah and his little group of rebels.

So, that's the way things moved.

CHAPTER 5

Now, in chapter five:

Moses was commanded to put out of the camp all of the leper's. And anyone who had a discharge., or whoever becomes defiled by a dead body. They had to be put outside the camp.

This, of course, was for hygienic purposes.

Both male and female, their to be outside of the camp, notice God said, "in the midst of which I dwell. "

Again to have that consciousness of the awesomeness of God's presence. Anything that was unclean had to be put outside of the camp. Why? Because God was dwelling within the camp. "I'm dwelling in the midst of the camp." And so in the midst of the camp where I dwell, don't want anything that's unclean, put them out.

Now, we get to an interesting, well:

When a man or a woman commits any sin, that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord., the person is guilty. He is to first of all confess his sin which he has done and then make restitution for the trespass , in full, adding a fifth part and give it to the one that he has wronged.

So, not only did you have to pay back, if you had cheated someone, not only did you have to pay them back the amount that you cheated you had to add twenty percent. You stole something from somebody you not only had to give them back the full value you had to add twenty percent to it. Restitution had to be made. And then if there was no kinsman, say that the person died and you own restitution and he didn't have any family than you have to give it to the priest. And it belonged then to the Lord.

Now, this interesting law concerning unfaithful wives. “Man, it was tough women, you’ve really come a long way.”

If a man's wife goes astray, behaves unfaithfully towards her husband, and another man lies with her carnally, it's hidden from the eyes of her husband and it is concealed that she has defiled herself because there was no witness against her and she wasn't caught. If the spirit of jealousy comes on her husband, he becomes jealous of his wife, who had defiled herself, or if the spirit of jealousy comes on him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself:

Now here's the rub. You may be living with a jealous man, he may be suspicious, it's possible that there are no grounds for his suspicions. It could be that you're just as faithful as any wife could be, but, yet he's just suspicious and jealous.

And if he gets jealous and suspicious of you, then he brings you to the priest and you bring an offering that is required for her, of one tenth of an ephah of barley meal. Don't put any oil on it, don't put any frankincense on it because it is a grain offering of jealousy; an offering for remembering and bringing for iniquity to remembrance. And so the priest brings her near and sets her before the Lord. Brings her into the tabernacle area, there. And then he takes some holy water, in a clay vessel, and he takes some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle, and he puts it in the water. And then he stands over the woman and he takes her head band off, or her head covering, the sort of hood they wore, and he puts the offerings for remembering in her hands, this little barley cake, which is the grain offering of jealousy, and the priest shall have in his hand bitter water that brings a curse. And so he will put her then under an oath and say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you and you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be free from the bitter water that brings a curse, but if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority and you've defiled yourself and some other man, other than your husband, has lain with you then the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people when the Lord makes your thigh rot and your belly swell."

So, he sort of puts a curse on her. When you drink this water, if you're guilty may your thigh rot and your belly swell. If you're not guilty may nothing happen to you. And so the woman then had to drink this bitter water. Now imagine if you had an extremely jealous husband. I mean every week in there drinking bitter water. Going through this whole routine of your thigh rotting and your belly swelling if you're guilty.

May this water that causes the curse go to your stomach and make your belly swell, verse 22, and your thigh rot. And the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it." (You know if I'm guilty, all right) And the priest shall write these curses in a book and he shall scrap them off into the bitter water and then he'll make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse and the water that brings a curse shall enter into her and become bitter. (And then he offers the grain offering and so forth.)

Now when he has made her to drink the water it shall be if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter and her belly will swell and her thigh will rot and the woman will become a curse among the people. But if she is not guilty and she's clean then she will be free from the curse and will be able to conceive and bare children.

The law of jealousy, when a wife while under her husband's authority goes astray, defiles herself, or the spirit of jealousy comes on him and he thinks that she is guilty.

Interesting that they didn't have any kind of a reverse thing on this. A wife couldn't bring her husband if she was suspicious of him or jealous of him. There was no provision for a wife, as I say women you have come a long way, and this interesting, interesting.

If you were guilty holding this offering in your hands the priest is uncovered your head and he puts his hand on your head and he says, “now, you know, when you drink this bitter water, may your thigh rot and your stomach swell and you say Amen, so be it, you know.” Man when you drank the water there would probably be enough, you know, chemicals being created in your system that would probably poison the water and actually, it would be feeling the guilt and knowing your guilty and having ascended to this curse.

Probably if it be studied out from a purely scientific stand point of the chemicals that are excreted from the various glands when I’m telling a lie or whatever. You know it probably would cause this very thing to come to pass. If your not guilty, no problem, except you have to drink that dirty water. But that could get tiring after a while too, I’m sure.

Next week as we move on we get into the law of the Nazarite, a very interesting law, and we’ll study it in the light of Samson and Jesus. For Jesus was to be known as a Nazarene. The vow of the Nazarite.

I thank God for you and may God just richly bless you for putting out the effort to be here tonight. That we might gather together and study the word of God and learn of his truth. That we might walk in the way of righteousness. That we might live a life that is pleasing unto the Lord. And that we might learn to put the Lord at the center of our lives and build our lives around him. May the Lord be with you, may the Lord bless you, may His hand be upon you this week, may he strengthen you by His spirit, and may he just bless you abundantly all week long, in Jesus name.