

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 1:1-46
“Elders Appointed”

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(The main theme of the Book of Numbers is that God’s people must learn to walk after him by faith. By trusting God and only by trusting him can God’s people move forward into the Promised Land. God’s instructions must be followed exactly, if God’s people are to be fully blessed.)

Numbers 1:1-46

Verse 1-2

YHWH 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: “Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one.”

- The Israelites had left Egypt two years prior to these events happening. They were in the Desert of Sinai. They were moving toward the land that God had promised them but they still had not found it. They were blindly following God to somewhere.
- According to Exodus 40:2 and 17, the Tabernacle, here called the Tent of Meeting had first been set up exactly one month before these events happened.
- Moses, Israel’s leader, was in the Tent of Meeting when God spoke to him. More than 150 times God speaks specifically to Moses giving him concise instructions in the Book of Numbers. God’s instructions to his people through Moses are specific and concern all matters which affect/effect Israel’s life as God’s people.
- On this day God commanded Moses to take a census of the entire Hebrew nation. Each man was to be listed in the census.

Verse 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.

- The purpose of this numbering is to determine who and how many men are available for military service in Israel.

Verse 4-16

“One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you. These are the names of the men who are to assist you: from Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur; from Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai; from Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab; from Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar; from Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon; from the sons of Joseph: from Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud; from Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur; from Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni; from Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai; from Asher, Pagiel son of Ocran; from Gad, Eliasaph son of Deuel; from Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan.” These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of the clans of Israel.

- The job is too big for Moses and Aaron to do alone. Twelve men are chosen by name by God to assist Moses and Aaron in taking the census.
- These twelve men are chosen by God for this task. Their agreement in assuming the task is taken for granted. God is calling them to this appointment. They have no other option but to accept.
- For whatever reason, unknown to us, there are to be twelve men on this task force with Moses and Aaron. As the tribe of Levi is eliminated from the count because its members are exempt from military service, the tribe of Joseph, God’s faithful servant from the past, is given two seats. While this may seem unreasonable to the other tribes, no questions are allowed as this is the command of God.
- These men are Israel’s elders.

Verse 17-19

Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been given, 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, as YHWH commanded Moses. And so he counted then in the Desert of Sinai:

- On the very day when God's command was received, Moses called together the team and the people and began the census in obedience to God's command. There was absolutely NO delay!

Verse 20-46

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. The number from the tribe of Reuben was 46,500. 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. The number from the tribe of Simeon was 59,300. 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. The number from the tribe of Gad was 45,650. 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. The number from the tribe of Judah was 74,600. 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. The number from the tribe of Issachar was 54,400. 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. The number from the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400. 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. The number from the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500. 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. The number from the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200. 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. The number from the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400. 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. The number from the tribe of Dan was 62,700. 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. The number from the tribe of Asher was 41,500. 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. The number from the tribe of Naphtali was 53,400. These were the men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family. All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel's army were counted according to their families. The total number was 603,550.

- The task was accomplished. The total number of men available to serve in the army was 603,550.
- This step was preparatory for Israel's future.
- It is guessed that the total population of the Hebrew nation at this time was about 3 million.
- Of those men whose names appeared on this list all of them died in the wilderness march except Caleb and Joshua.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Elders Appointed*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)