

Numbers 1-4

September 25, 2011

Introduction:

Today's lesson begins a study of the book of **Numbers**. In this book, a census is taken of God's people in the wilderness.

1:5-15 What are the names of the tribes of Israel mentioned in **chapter 1 verse 5 to 15**?

- The tribes are **Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph** (the half-tribe of **Ephraim** and the half-tribe of **Manasseh**), **Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Gad, and Naphtali**.

What other tribe is not mentioned in these verses? Why?

- The **Levites** were a special family set apart to serve the Lord and here were considered a separate people (1:47).

Notice that **Joseph's** two sons, **Ephraim** and **Manasseh**, constitute "half-tribes" from this point on.

1:44-46 In **verse 46** we learn that there were **603,550 men** twenty years and older in the tribes of Israel not counting the men in the tribe of **Levi**. How many people would you guess were in the nation at this time?

- There were over **600,000** men over the age of **20**, so there was probably at least that many women (**600,000**). This puts us at **1.2 million**. There were likely twice that many children; that puts us at **2.4 million**. There were **22,000 males one month and older** among the **Levites**; this does not include the females. There were around **2.5 million** Jews living in and traveling through the desert wilderness.

Imagine the logistical monstrosity of organizing and feeding that many people who were "camping out". How did they do it?

- **They had a plan.** Tribes stayed together; families within those tribes stayed together (**chapter 2**). They had an organization of people who were in charge and responsible. The heads of the tribes are listed in **1:5-15**. **Aaron** was over the **Levites**. The three families within the Levite tribe were given specific assignments concerning the Tabernacle and its furnishings (**3:25-37 & 4:1-49**). **Eleazar** (*el-ee-AY-zur*), the son of Aaron, oversaw the **Kohathites** (*KO-huh-thites*) as they moved and set up the furnishings within the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. **Ithamar** (*ITH-uh-mahr*), the son of Aaron, oversaw the other two families as they moved the Tabernacle and its pieces.

3:4 What is recorded in **chapter 3 verse 4**? Why did they die? See **Leviticus 10:1-3**.

- These two sons of Aaron were priests to the Lord. They were only to offer before the Lord the fire that burned on the bronze altar for the incense offering. In **Luke 1:8-20**, Zacharias (father of John the Baptizer) was offering incense when the angel told him that his wife would give birth to John. They apparently entered the Holy of Holies with this fire since they offered it "before the Lord". The "fire" came out from the "presence of the Lord" – from above the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant between the Cherubim. Only the High Priest (**Aaron – once a year – Leviticus 16:1-3**) and Moses were to enter the Holy of Holies. **Leviticus 10:9-10** infers that they likely were drunk when they did this. **Leviticus 10:1** tells us that they did not do this as the Lord had commanded.

What might *we* learn from this story?

- We are not free to serve God as we please. We don't serve God on our terms; we serve Him on His terms. Cain's offering was rejected by God because he brought the offering he wanted to bring instead of the one that God had asked for (**Genesis 4:2-5**).

Notice that “how” we serve God is a big deal. **See Numbers 1:51 and 3:10,38. In chapter 16 Korah will lead a rebellion assuming he and others can do what Aaron and Moses did. God will show Korah and the people that He decides how He will be served...not us.**

The Ark of the Covenant is sometimes called the Ark of the Testimony (4:5) because it contained the Ten Commandment tablets (Exodus 40:20). What do we learn in chapters 3 and 4 about how the Ark was to be handled?

- Only the **Kohathites** were to move it. **3:29-31**
- Aaron and his sons would take down the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place and lay it over the Ark. They would then cover it with porpoise skin (waterproof) and a blue cloth. **4:5-6**
- Aaron and his sons would insert the gold-covered poles into Ark's rings (**Exodus 25:13-15**) if they had not been left there.

Did the Kohathites ever see the Ark?

- **No.** Only the priests would go into the Holy Place and only Aaron (once a year) and Moses were ever to see the Ark once it was completed and consecrated.

What would happen if anyone touched the Ark?

- Anyone touching the Ark would die (**4:15**).

What would happen if anyone besides Aaron or Moses saw the Ark?

- Anyone else who saw the Ark would die (**4:20**).

In 1 Samuel chapters 3 and 4, the Ark comes into the possession of the Philistines. Who can tell us what happened there?

- Israel took the Ark into battle assuming that with it they could not be defeated. They were defeated and the Ark was taken to Ashdod (*ASH-dahd*) by the Philistines. They put it in the temple of a god named Dagon (*DAY-gun*). The next morning the statue of Dagon was face down before the Ark. They set the false god back upright. The next morning he was on his face again with body parts cut or broken off (**5:1-4**). The people of Ashdod then broke out in a horrible epidemic of “tumors” (**literally “hemorrhoids”- 5:6,12**). There apparently was also an infestation of mice (**6:4-5**). They put the Ark on a cart and place a box with it containing golden hemorrhoids and mice as a “guilt” offering to appease Jehovah. Some cows pulled the cart back into Jewish territory. The Jews at Beth-shemesh opened the Ark, looking into it, and over **50,000 men died**.

In 2 Samuel 6:1-7 David seeks to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. What happens there?

- The Jews try to move the Ark on a cart. The cart gets wobbly and Uzzah (*YOU-zuh*) touches the Ark and dies.

Why did God deal so severely with Uzzah?

- Rather than the **Kohathites**, the wrong people (**sons of Abinadab**) were moving the Ark. Rather than carrying it on poles, they were moving the Ark on a cart. They did not have it covered. God had told them earlier through Moses that they were not to see or touch the Ark or they would die. In **6:13** we see that men are carrying (“bearing”) the Ark on the poles. In **1 Kings 8**, the Ark is placed in Solomon’s Temple. See **verses 6 to 10**. These poles were loooooong poles; no one was going to touch the Ark again.

3:11-13 What do we learn from chapter 3 verses 11 to 13?

All of our “firsts” *belong* to the Lord. The firstborn of families belong to the Lord. Jehovah took the tribe of Levi as a substitute for all of Israel’s firstborn. The first day of the week (the Lord’s Day – Sunday) is the Christian’s “Sabbath” day. We are to give to God the first (**Proverbs 3:9**) **10%** of our income (**Leviticus 27:30**). All of these “firsts” are reminders that we belong to the Lord; we are not our own (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**).