

Numbers, Chapters 1-3 / A Pattern of Order, Set by God

Exodus covered a year; Leviticus only a month - but the Book of Numbers encompasses more than 38 years

Chapter One: *The First Census*

Read Numbers 1:1-4 “*All in Israel able to go to war*” shows that the invasion of Canaan is imminent. They were about to take hold of the promise. Look up: Exodus 3:17

v.20 -46 - The number of men between the ages of 20 and 60 comes to a total of 603,550. When women, children, and men under 20 and over 60 are included, the total population would probably have been about 2 million.

This census has two purposes: (1) to demonstrate the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore; and (2) to count the number of men over 20 years old who could fight. Both considerations should give the people confidence in their battle for the land.

Read Numbers 1:47-54

The Levites, the priestly tribe, were not included in the census because they had a more important job than fighting. They were responsible for the tabernacle, God's palace, the most vital part of the whole camp. The Levites also guarded it from intruders. Entry to the tabernacle by laypeople could lead to divine wrath breaking out and the death of many Israelites, so the Levites were told to execute any outsider breaking in. A similar threat had been made against anyone trying to approach God on Mount Sinai. Look up: Exodus 19:11-13.

To maintain the balance of 12 Tribes, Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh are counted separately. Recall that Jacob (“Israel”) had adopted Joseph's two sons as his own.

Chapter Two: *God Orders the Tribes for Camp and on the March*

This chapter prescribes how the camp was to be arranged by tribe with the tabernacle in the center of the camp.

Read Numbers 2:1-9, 32-34

Judah was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself, although Reuben was firstborn. Look up: Genesis 49:3-10; Hebrews 7:14

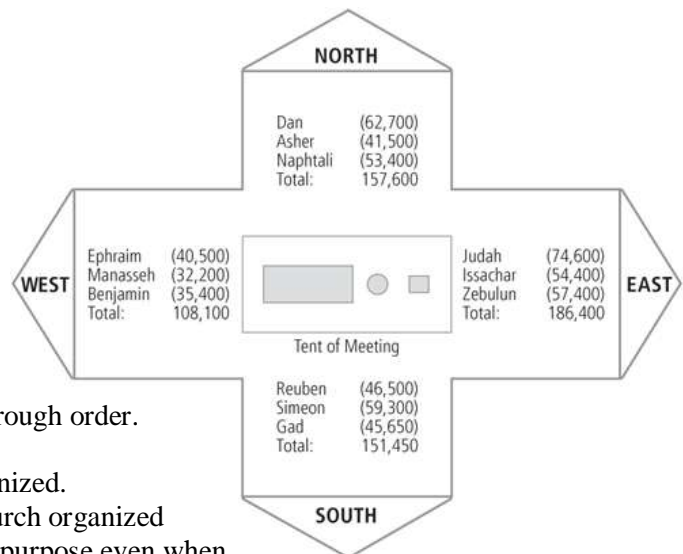
The rest of the chapter describes the order of the tribes when camped, as shown by this chart.

The same order of tribe was to be followed on the march.

Consider the creation account of Genesis chapter one. God works through order.

In preparing to enter the Promised Land God called Israel to be organized.

God works through hierarchy, wives submitting to husbands, the church organized under deacons and elders. He moves through organization and with purpose even when we can't figure it out. Look up: Psalm 147:4



Chapter Three: *The Duties of the Levites*

Read Numbers 3:5-10 The Levites were set apart to serve the priestly clan of Aaron. Their tasks of guarding the tabernacle when camped, disassembling it for the march and reassembling it for encampments, are explained in detail in chapter 4. Those tasks, like the ordering of the tribes when encamped and on-the-march, obviously have one reality in mind: Israel was going to war.

Read Numbers 3:12-13. Rather than demanding the firstborn from the twelve tribes, the Levites were set apart. After the last plague in Egypt, when God spared Israel's firstborn, all firstborn males and cattle were dedicated to God's service, which would have no doubt been service in God's tabernacle. Why did God take the Levites instead of the firstborn among the children of Israel? Look up: Exodus 32:25-26

In closing: Read Colossians 2:5