

May 18

Scriptures: Read Number 1

Key Verse: “So all who were numbered of the children of Israel... were able to go to war in Israel” (Numbers 1:45)

Overview

One month after the Tabernacle had been erected (Ex.40:17), Moses took a census of all the men of Israel 20 years old and upward who were eligible to bear arms and go to battle. It marked the start of preparation for the Israelites to move onward which was to begin in just 19 days (Num.10:11-12). They had to be well organized and ready for war, since on their way to Canaan they would encounter many enemies. Only true Israelites, not those of the “mixed multitude”, among the people of God, and those not in covenant relationship with Him could not engage in His battles. The church of Jesus Christ is often pictured as an army engaged in a battle with the enemy, Satan. All who are in the New Covenant relationship with Christ must enlist as soldiers for His cause and “wage the good warfare” (1Tim.1:18; 2 Tim.2:3-4).

The words, “the Lord spoke to Moses” (1:1), are found about eighty times in the book of Numbers. This is a clear indication that Moses was indeed the author. God directed His steps, and the census was a direct command from Him. God also appointed an able man from each tribe to help Moses and Aaron calculate the numbers. What a great responsibility these twelve men were given, and how honored they were to have their names specifically mentioned by God and to be chosen to serve Him in this way! Those who are capable and willing to fulfill the task will be chosen and honored by God.

The tribe of Judah was the largest, and therefore they were the leaders in the march (1:26-27). The total number of the census came to 603,550 fighting men. Some liberal commentators have expressed doubt that the actual number was so high, because it would mean that there would have been over two million people in the wilderness. However, this type of thinking minimizes God’s ability to care for them all, as this book illustrates He did. Exodus 1:7 describes their remarkable growth while in Egypt, so much so that the Egyptians felt they were a threat to their national security (Ec.1:9-10). The census served to prove God’s faithfulness in keeping His promise to Abraham, and it is clear evidence of His blessings upon them (Gen.12:2). It also is evidence of the great care God took of His people. He is called the Shepherd of Israel (Ps.80:1): each shepherd takes count of his sheep and knows each one, for each is valuable and he does not want one to be lost. Jesus is the Good Shepherd of those who follow Him today. He knows those who are His own and calls them by name (John 10:3, 11 14).

The census excluded the tribe of Levi, which was exempted from military service because God had called them to serve in the Tabernacle (1:49-50). Ministers of the Lord should not become entangled with things that would distract them from their holy calling. The tribe of Levi was honored over the others because they had shown themselves faithful in the incident of the golden calf (Ex.32:26). Only they could touch or see the holy things of God; no one else was permitted to even come close, lest the judgment of death come upon him. The Levites were to camp around

the Tabernacle in order to protect the sanctity of it and prevent the wrath of God upon those who might sin and defile it (1:51-53).

People are unworthy to have fellowship with God and behold His holiness and glory until they have been called by His grace into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ—only then are they made worthy. Isaiah prophesied that God would show His glory to be Gentiles, and He will “take some of them for priests and Levites” (Isa.66:21).

Prayer

Thank You, that in the New Agreement between You and Your only begotten Son, everybody is welcome to come boldly unto the Throne of Grace to find help in time of need.