



Tribe by Tribe Military Roll Call: Numbers 1 Explained

Scriptures for Today: Numbers 1:20-46

""Numbers 1:20-46

And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 21 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Reuben, were forty and six thousand and five hundred. 22 Of the children of Simeon, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, those that were numbered of them, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 23 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Simeon, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred. 24 Of the children of Gad, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 25 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Gad, were forty and five thousand six hundred and fifty. 26 Of the children of Judah, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 27 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Judah, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred. 28 Of the children of Issachar, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 29 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Issachar, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred. 30 Of the children of Zebulun, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 31 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Zebulun, were fifty and seven thousand and four hundred. 32 Of the children of Joseph, namely, of the children of Ephraim, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 33 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand and five hundred. 34 Of the children of Manasseh, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 35 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Manasseh, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred. 36 Of the children of Benjamin, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 37 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Benjamin, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred. 38 Of the children of Dan, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 39 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Dan, were threescore and two thousand and seven hundred. 40 Of the children of Asher, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 41 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Asher,



were forty and one thousand and five hundred. 42 Of the children of Naphtali, throughout their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 43 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Naphtali, were fifty and three thousand and four hundred. 44 These are those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers. 45 So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; 46 Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.”

Introduction — What Has Happened in the Bible So Far

By the time we reach the Book of Numbers, God has already revealed a massive storyline:

Genesis — Creation... the Fall... the Flood... the call of Abraham... Isaac... Jacob... the twelve tribes... Israel going into Egypt.

Exodus — Israel multiplied... Pharaoh oppressed them... God raised up Moses... the plagues... the Passover... the Red Sea crossing... manna from heaven... water from the rock... the giving of the Law... the tabernacle built... Israel becomes a nation redeemed by blood and power.

Leviticus — God teaches His people how to worship, how to approach Him, and how holiness affects daily life. Offerings. Priests. Purity. Obedience.

Now comes **Numbers**, where Israel is preparing to move forward. They are no longer slaves in Egypt. They are no longer new worshippers learning how to do things. They are now an **army**—called to march, fight, follow God’s presence, and move toward the land He promised.

Numbers begins with order, structure, and leadership.

Quick Summary of Numbers 1:1–19

God commands Moses to **number**, or register, all the tribes of Israel: every man, every tribe, every family, every name, every male, from twenty years old and upward, “All that are able to go forth to war.”

This census or numbering of the people is not for taxation, and not for organization—it is for **warfare**. Israel is about to travel through wilderness, face enemies, and eventually confront giants in Canaan. God wants them organized, prepared, structured, and ready.

Each tribe is assigned a leader. Each leader helps count the fighting men. The tabernacle will be in the center. The tribes will camp around it in military formation (Numbers 2). Everything is done with precision. God is a God of order, not chaos. God wants everything in perfect order.



Now, verses 20–46 give the **actual numbers** tribe by tribe. Many Christians rush through this passage, but it is rich with meaning, prophecy, symbolism, and spiritual truth. Let's walk through it Scripture by Scripture and remember that this is the **PERFECT** word of God.

Reuben — The Firstborn Who Lost Preeminence

""Numbers 1:20–21

And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 21 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Reuben, were forty and six thousand and five hundred. ""

Reuben was Jacob's firstborn, but he you can read Jacob's prophecy of his son and how Reuben is "unstable was water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed then defiledst thou it" (Genesis 49:3–4). Reuben slept with Bilhah his father's concubine.

Yet God still counts his tribe first—showing **grace** and not merit. So, I want you to keep Genesis 49 in mind here and please go back and read through that. Jacob or Israel prophesies about his sons and these 12 tribes of Israel.

46,500 soldiers — a large number, showing strength despite failure. You may lose position through sin, but God can still use you when you walk with Him.

Simeon — A Tribe That Would Later Diminish

""Numbers 1:22-23

Of the children of Simeon, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, those that were numbered of them, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 23 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Simeon, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred. ""

Simeon appears strong here: **59,300 men**. But later—in Numbers 26—they will drop drastically because of sin at Baal-peor. Fornication, and one of the heads of that rebellion was from the tribe of Simeon, and God commanded Moses to hang the heads up of thousands of people. The lesson here is present strength does not guarantee future blessing. Obedience does.

Gad — A Tribe Born from Difficulty

""Numbers 1:24-25

Of the children of Gad, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 25 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Gad, were forty and five thousand six hundred and fifty. ""

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Numbers 1:20-46

Gad descends from Zilpah, Leah's handmaid. A tribe born from a complicated family situation. Yet God counts them fully. The lesson here is your origin does not limit your usefulness to God.

Judah — The Royal Tribe, the Largest Number

""Numbers 1:26-27

Of the children of Judah, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 27 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Judah, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred. ""

Judah is the largest: **74,600 men**. Why? Remember that the Messiah will come from Judah (Genesis 49:10). Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah. Judah's growth is prophetic: everything connected to Christ grows strong.

Issachar — A Tribe Known for Wisdom and Understanding

"" Numbers 1:28-29

Of the children of Issachar, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 29 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Issachar, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred. ""

Issachar will later be described as men "that had understanding of the times" (1 Chr 12:32). Strong and discerning: **54,400 men**.

Zebulun — A Tribe of Faithful Workers

""Numbers 1:30-31

Of the children of Zebulun, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 31 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Zebulun, were fifty and seven thousand and four hundred. ""

Zebulun is associated with labor, trade, and support (Deut 33:18–19). They are providers. Faithful contributors. **57,400 men** — stability and strength. For example, at this church, we need stability, consistency, strength, and faithful workers. And God builds the church around these people.

Ephraim — Fruitfulness

""Numbers 1:32-33

Of the children of Joseph, namely, of the children of Ephraim, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years

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old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 33 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand and five hundred."'"

Joseph is counted through his two sons. Ephraim fulfills his name: "*fruitful.*" **40,500 men.**

Manasseh — The Forgotten Tribe God Still Remembers

""Numbers 1:34-35

Of the children of Manasseh, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 35 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Manasseh, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred."'"

Manasseh is the smaller of Joseph's sons, yet God lists him with honor. **32,200 men.** Smaller does not mean insignificant.

Benjamin — Strength from Sorrow

""Numbers 1:36-37

Of the children of Benjamin, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 37 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Benjamin, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred."'"

Benjamin was born as Rachel died. From sorrow came strength. **35,400 soldiers** — God brings blessing out of brokenness.

Dan — A Tribe of Influence

""Numbers 1:38-39

Of the children of Dan, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 39 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Dan, were threescore and two thousand and seven hundred."'"

Dan is large: **62,700 men.** Later, Dan becomes influential—for good and bad. They also travel at the rear of the camp as protectors.

Asher — A Tribe Blessed with Abundance

""Numbers 1:40-41

Of the children of Asher, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to



go forth to war; 41 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Asher, were forty and one thousand and five hundred. ""

Prophecies about Asher include abundance, riches, and strength (Deut 33:24–25). **41,500** men numbered for war.

Naphtali — A People of Freedom

""Numbers 1:42-43

Of the children of Naphtali, throughout their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 43 Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Naphtali, were fifty and three thousand and four hundred. ""

Jacob prophesied Naphtali as “a hind let loose” — free, fast, and fruitful. **53,400** men.

Total Count of the Army of Israel

""Numbers 1:44-46

These are those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers. 45 So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; 46 Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. ""

603,550 soldiers. Not counting women. Not counting children. Not counting the elderly. Not counting the Levites. Israel is now a nation that can stand, march, defend, and conquer. God has now taken these slaves to the Egyptians and turned them into soldiers ready to battle.

Numbers 1 Census + Mothers + Camp Arrangement

Tribe	Number of Men	Rank	Mother	Camp	# In Camp
Reuben	46,500	7	Leah	South	151,450
Simeon	59,300	3	Leah	South	
Gad	45,650	8	Zilpah (Leah's maid)	South	
Judah	74,600	1	Leah	East	186,400
Issachar	54,400	5	Leah	East	
Zebulun	57,400	4	Leah	East	
Ephraim	40,500	10	Rachel (through Joseph)	West	108,100
Manasseh	32,200	12	Rachel (through Joseph)	West	
Benjamin	35,400	11	Rachel	West	
Dan	62,700	2	Bilhah (Rachel's maid)	North	157,600
Asher	41,500	9	Zilpah (Leah's maid)	North	
Naphtali	53,400	6	Bilhah (Rachel's maid)	North	
Total	603,550				

Practical Applications of Numbers 1:20–46

1. God Knows You by Name. This chapter is not random numbers—every count represents a person known by God. If God numbers soldiers, God numbers your battles, your struggles, your tears, your steps.

2. God Values Order. Numbers 1 proves God is a God of arrangement and structure. Churches need order. Families need order. Lives need order. Chaos is never God's design.

3. God Uses All Types of People. Rich tribes, small tribes, broken tribes, handmaid tribes, sorrowful tribes. God lists them all. You don't need a perfect background for God to use you.

4. Strength Comes from God's Blessing, Not Human Ability. Judah is big because Christ comes from Judah. Manasseh is small but still protected. Simeon is large now but will diminish through sin later. Obedience determines blessing, not talent.

5. God Prepares His People for Future Battles. The numbering occurs **before** the warfare. God prepares us spiritually before He sends us into conflict. Your devotion, your Bible reading, your prayer life—these are your census, your preparation for future victory.

God Does Not Count What He Does Not Intend to Use

Numbers 1 is not a dry roll call. It is a declaration of purpose. If God numbers you, He knows you. If God knows you, He equips you. If God equips you, He intends to use you.

Israel wasn't counted to sit still—they were counted to move, march, fight, and obey. And the same God who ordered their steps orders yours.

When God calls your name, He is also calling your life into His service. You matter. Your place matters. Your assignment matters.

You are counted because you are called. You are called because God is not done with you.

Let's pray.