



Herein is Love

COMMENTARY SERIES

Numbers

A Commentary for Children

4

Includes
Teaching
Guide

Nancy E. Ganz

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The many people who have encouraged me to continue with these books, I sincerely thank for their kind words, which really do help me in my work.

Once again I am greatly indebted to Matthew Henry for his commentaries, which never cease to inspire me in my studies of God's Word.

I also must mention my husband, Richard L. Ganz, whose enthusiasm for my writing never wanes.

I also thank Jim Peterson, who keeps the computers running smoothly, and Stas Jesionka, who works through all the technical intricacies and difficulties of each book.

Finally, I thank Nicora Gangi Manwaring for another beautiful landscape that is perfect for another one of my books. This particular piece of art - "The Bright Morning Star" - is part of my own private collection of her work. This picture has hung beside my bed for many years and it is the dawn I see each morning when I first open my eyes. I am glad that I can share this spectacular sight with the readers of my book.

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Numbers opens with these words: “The LORD spoke to Moses...He said, ‘Take a census of the whole Israelite community...listing every man by name, one by one...Number all the men in Israel...’” (Numbers 1:1-3). The LORD of Hosts is concerned with counting and listing, numbering and recording. We see this work of God, not just in the book called “Numbers”; we see this throughout His Holy Word. Long lists of numbers are part of God’s Wonderful Word! They are even part of His Glorious Gospel! From the beginning of the Bible to its end we see God counting and listing - and we must see these divine activities as part of the “awesome deeds of the LORD.” How does the Bible begin? In the opening verses of Genesis, God numbers the days of creation, and each day’s number becomes its name: the first day, the second day, the third day... until the Seventh Day, the Sabbath Day, the holy day of rest (Genesis 1:1 - 2:3). How does the Bible end? In the Bible’s final book we repeatedly see the number of all things brought to perfection. Revelation is riddled with numbers of symbolic significance. Again and again the numbers of perfection are revealed: three, seven, ten, twelve (or three fours), twenty-four (or two twelves), one

hundred and forty-four (or twelve twelves), and a thousand. In Revelation we see the seven lampstands, which are the seven churches, and the seven stars, which are the seven angels, (Revelation 1:20); the twenty-four elders seated on the twenty-four thrones (Revelation 4:4); the four living creatures, and “each of the four living creatures had six wings with eyes all around, even under his wings” (Revelation 4:8); the Lamb, who was worthy to take the scroll and open its seven seals, the Lamb with his seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God (Revelation 5:1-10); the myriads of angels, who worshipped the Lamb, “numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Revelation 4:11); the opening of the seven seals (Revelation 6); “the four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth” (Revelation 7:1); the number of those who had the seal of the living God: 144,000 - 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel - a number representing perfection (Revelation 7:4-8), who were the “great multitude that no one [except God] could count” (Revelation 7:9); “the angels who had the seven trumpets” (Revelation 8:6); the three angels (Revelation 14:6-13); the seven angels with the seven plagues in the seven golden bowls (Revelation 15 & 16); the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God with its gates and its walls, its foundations and its dimensions, all carefully numbered, measured and recorded - that we might know that it was a place of perfection: “It had a great high wall with twelve gates and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:12-14). The city measured 12,000 x 12,000 x 12,000 stadia - a city of PERFECTION, the city of God!

Revelation also speaks about a mysterious number, a number of imperfection, which belongs to the beast who blasphemes God. The Bible says that the mark of the beast is “the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666” (Revelation 13:17,18).

There is only one book in the Bible that we call “Numbers” - but numbers fill the Scriptures from beginning to end. Think about Exodus: This book deals with the Ten Plagues, a number which corresponds with the actual number of plagues, but which also represents the perfection of God’s Judgement (Exodus 7-11); the Ten Commandments, a number which represents the perfection of God’s Law (Exodus 20); and the exact dimensions of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26 & 27), which is “a copy and shadow of what

is in heaven” - the Perfect Tabernacle, “the True Tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man” (Hebrews 8:5,2). Think also of Leviticus: This book deals with the precise number of sacrifices to be offered each year - a staggering number! While the vast numbers of these sacrifices demonstrate their own imperfection, nonetheless their numerical symbolic significance points to the perfection of Christ’s Sacrifice, “because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14). Often the number of sacrifices required on a certain holy day was a perfect number, such as seven or ten.

Now let us think about Numbers: Why has God recorded in His Holy Word these long lists of numbers? Why did God command a census to be taken, and then a second census to be taken - both recorded in the book of Numbers? What was the purpose of each census? And why is it important for us to know about these numbers? How can the record of a census of a people who existed thousands of years ago possibly have any relevance for us today? Why, of all the things in the world to study, would you study this? The Bible says of itself that, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching” (II Timothy 3:16), so even the record of an ancient census must have value for us.

What was God’s purpose in commanding that a census be taken?

1. The census had several practical purposes for Israel: It was used to collect the “temple tax” - the money necessary for the upkeep of the Tabernacle. The LORD said to Moses, “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted...Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel...All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD...Receive this atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD, making atonement for your lives (Exodus 30:11-16).
2. The census had another very practical purpose for Israel in those ancient days: It was the organization of the nation’s army! This was the first step that each man took to become a soldier. Being counted in the census was his enlistment into Israel’s army. By faith, in obedience to the LORD’s direct command to take a census, an army was being formed for the conquest of Canaan.
3. Another practical reason for the census was this: It was the inheritance list. (If you have ever been involved in dividing up an inheritance, you know how important those lists are!) Whoever was named on the census list, which was the army list - that man and his family received an

inheritance in the Promised Land.

4. The existence of the nation of Israel was based upon the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God promised Abraham: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you...I swear by Myself, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore” (Genesis 12:2 & 22:17). God also promised Isaac, “I will bless you and increase the number of your descendants” (Genesis 26:24). The same promise was repeated to Jacob; God said, “Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth...Be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you” (Genesis 28:14 & 35:11). Who can count the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore or the dust of the earth? God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to make their descendants so numerous that they could not be counted. In the counting of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in Israel, we see the LORD fulfilling His Word! By faith, Abraham believed God’s Promise, “and so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore” (Hebrews 11:12). Moses himself said to the Israelites, “The LORD your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as many as the stars in the sky. May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as He has promised”(Deuteronomy 1:10,11).

5. However, this counting and listing of Israel’s soldiers long ago upon the earth, was just a shadow or a picture for us of the gathering of the great and glorious army of heaven - that great multitude of saints, whose names are written in the “Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:2). God’s heavenly army is numbered and listed and sealed tribe by tribe, the number of each tribe totalling 12,000, which is not a literal number, but a number representing perfection! (See Revelation 7:1-8.) The Israel of God numbers 12,000 x 12 or 144,000 - once again, not an actual number, but a symbolic number of perfection, representing that “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). This then is the final and ultimate fulfilment of God’s Promise! The LORD promised Abraham that he would be “a father of many nations” and his wife Sarah would be “the mother of nations” (Genesis 17:5,6,16). God also promised Jacob that he would be the father, not just of one nation, but “a community of nations” (Genesis 35:11). “Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations on earth will

be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:3, 13:15, 24:7). So those who have faith [in Christ] are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Galatians 3: 7-9). The blessing given to Abraham would encompass the whole world through Jesus Christ! We see that the census of Israel in Numbers was just a small earthly glimpse of that great heavenly host, that one day would be gathered from all nations on earth!

6. We cannot number or record all the wonderful works that God has done (Psalm 40:5). We see only the faintest glimmer of who He is and can count only the smallest fraction of what He does - but God knows everything about us! God knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees every moment of our lives from beginning to end and He knows us to the very depths of our souls (Psalm 139:1-16). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight" (Hebrews 4:13). "The eyes of the LORD are everywhere" (Proverbs 15:3). God keeps track of human beings because He loves them, just as parents keep careful watch over the lives of their little ones. The Holy God tells us to look into the night sky filled with stars and He asks us: "To whom will you compare Me? Who is My equal? Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing" (Isaiah 40: 25,26). This same God, who "counts the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Psalm 147:4), also gives life to his people one by one, and names them, and watches over their lives, so that not one of them is missing. Jesus taught us even the little birds are not forgotten by God, so we need not fear that God will forget us. Not even a tiny common sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the will of our Heavenly Father. We must not be afraid, for one human being is worth infinitely more to God than whole flocks of sparrows or a whole world full of beautiful birds! Jesus said, "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid" (Matthew 10:29-31 & Luke 12:6,7). Do you know the number of hairs on your own head? Have you ever tried to count them? You see, God knows us better than we know ourselves and He keeps far better records of our lives than we do! He hears our sighs; He knows our grief; He feels our pain; He counts our tears; He numbers our journeys; He remembers our sorrows. God also sees our many sins, but, because we believe in Jesus Christ, He forgives them all. Not one of our troubles is insignificant to God. We can pray: "O God... record my lament. Number my wanderings. List my tears on Your scroll and save them in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book" (Psalm 56:8)? Not a single tear falls from our eyes that God does not see and count! Do we realize how great God's LOVE is for us? Do we realize how wonderful it is to be counted by the LORD?

The numbering of the soldiers in Israel's army was another demonstration of God's great LOVE for His people!

7. "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God...Herein is LOVE: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (I John 4:7,10,11). God knew the number of soldiers in Israel's army and He knew each one of them by name, but Moses did not have this information. God commanded Moses to take a census of the soldiers in Israel and to keep a written record of that census because the life of every individual soldier in Israel's army must be viewed as important to the nation. They must not be like Cain, who belonged to the Evil One, and said, "Am I my brother's keeper" (Genesis 4:9)? Taking a census - counting the soldiers and listing their names - was a way for the nation to keep watch over the lives of their "brothers" in the army. To keep track of the men, who were risking their lives for the community, was a way of demonstrating love towards them. "We love because God first loved us...And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (I John 4:19,21).

The Book of Numbers also deals repeatedly with Israel's rebellion against God. Not surprisingly, we find that God was keeping careful track of their numerous revolts against Him. The people's rebellion reached its culmination in Numbers 14, when God declared that Israel "disobeyed and tested Me ten times" (Numbers 14:22). That God keeps account of sin is a sobering and terrifying reality. Not one of our sins escapes God's notice, but there is hope. In Numbers, when we read of the people's rebellion, we also read of God's compassion. Moses declared God's own Word: "The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in LOVE and forgiving sin and rebellion" (Numbers 14:18).

*If You, O LORD, kept a record of sins,
O LORD, who could stand?
But with You there is forgiveness.
Therefore You are feared.*

*O Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing LOVE
and with Him is full redemption.
He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*

*Psalm 130:3,4,7,8
BLESSED IS HE,*

WHOSE TRANSGRESSIONS ARE FORGIVEN,
WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED.
BLESSED IS THE MAN,
WHOSE SIN THE LORD DOES NOT COUNT
AGAINST HIM.

PSALM 32:1,2

Through faith in Christ our sins are covered. In Jesus Christ, not only are our sins forgiven by God, they are also forgotten. Our sins are completely erased from the record, so that they no longer count against us.

*Praise the LORD, O my soul...
The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in LOVE.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour His anger forever.
He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His LOVE
for those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us...
Praise the LORD, O my soul!*

Psalm 103:1,8-12,22

As with every other book in the Bible, Numbers is a book that brings us to our knees in faith and love, with our grateful and thankful hearts overflowing with praise to our God.

GOD'S ARMY

Numbers 1, 2 & 9:1-14;
Deuteronomy 8:15

More than a year had passed since the exodus from Egypt, but the Israelites were still in the wilderness at the foot of Mount Sinai. Why were they still there? Why had God kept the Israelites waiting in that “dreadful desert” for such a long time? What were they doing there? Why wasn’t God leading them swiftly and bringing them safely into Canaan, the land He had promised to give them? The Israelites were still waiting there, because they were not yet prepared to take possession of the Promised Land! It was by faith that they must conquer kingdoms - and their faith was lacking. Before they could fight by faith, they must learn how to live by faith. During this time in the desert, God was preparing a people for Himself, a people who believed in Him:

1) At the very beginning of their journey in the wilderness, when Israel was camped in the desert by the Red Sea, they witnessed God’s miraculous deliverance when He made a path for them through the parted waters. The crossing of the Red Sea was salvation for Israel, but destruction for Egypt. This was Israel’s baptism, when “they were all baptized...in the sea” (I Corinthians 10:2).

2) Day by day in that vast wasteland, the Israelites were learning to trust in God to provide for them all the necessities of life. It was a “thirsty and waterless land”, a land where such a multitude of people should have

starved to death or died of thirst, but daily the LORD provided both food and water for them.

3) In that hostile terrain the Israelites were learning to trust God to deliver them from evil. That rocky and remote region was filled with venomous snakes and poisonous scorpions. Bands of robbers and murderers hid in those hills; there were whole armies of enemy soldiers who were cruel, wicked and blood-thirsty. This was also a land inhabited by evil spirits, where not only jackals howled, but demons shrieked in the swirling, screaming sand storms. There too, Israel's great enemy, the devil, was prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone - or all of them - to devour. The Israelites must learn to trust in God to protect them and defend them from all harm.

4) There in the desert, the Israelites were learning to live by every word that came from the mouth of God. They were learning to believe and obey God's Word. There at Mount Sinai, they had been given God's Holy Law, the Ten Commandments, which would teach them how to live. Through that law they were learning how to be God's people, a nation holy to the LORD.

5) It was in the wilderness that God established His Covenant with the nation of Israel.

6) It was there in the desert, at the foot of Mount Sinai, that the Israelites were learning how to worship the LORD. "The Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year" (Exodus 40:17). During that month the Israelites had been worshipping the LORD according to His commands, with consecrated priests offering morning and evening sacrifices that were pleasing to the LORD. This was just as God had promised Moses before the exodus, when He said, "I will be with you...When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12) - and that is exactly what Israel was doing!

7) During that same month, (the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt,) the LORD spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai. God said, "Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time...at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations" (Numbers 9:1-3). In observing this sacred ceremony, the Israelites would be celebrating the first anniversary of the exodus! One full year had passed since God had brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery! The LORD had commanded Pharaoh, "Let My people go, so they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness" (Exodus 5:1). Now the day of their feast had arrived! At last, in the Desert of Sinai, they would be holding a festival to the LORD! The Bible records: "The Israelites did everything,

just as the LORD commanded Moses" (Numbers 9:5). This was the first time that they celebrated the Feast of Passover as a free people, in remembrance of the night when God passed over their houses and spared their sons, in remembrance of the night when God set all of them free. This Feast of Passover was their first commemoration service of this great deliverance.

All these things during the past year had strengthened Israel's faith in God. The past thirteen months spent in this wasteland had not been a waste! It had been a time of vital training and testing. God had been preparing the hearts of His people to fight by faith, which was of primary importance in their preparation for war.

Of secondary importance was the organization of Israel's army. Now, on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, (after God's Tabernacle had been erected and after the Passover had been celebrated, both events occurring at the beginning of that same new year,) the LORD spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai. God told Moses to take a census. God said, "Take a census of the whole Israelite community, by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one." God commanded Moses and Aaron, "Number all the men in Israel twenty years old or more, men who are able to serve in the army." This was not an ordinary census, where the total population of a place was counted and recorded. This census did not include everybody, because this census was really the organization of an army! Soon God would be giving the command: "Forward march, into the Promised Land!" - and the army must be ready in every way.

It would be an enormous task to take this census, to record all the names of all these men, but God gave Moses and Aaron people to help them. God said, "One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you." God Himself chose these men, telling Moses their names. They were men appointed by God from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the clans of Israel. So Moses and Aaron took these twelve men, whose names had been given, and they called the whole community together. For each tribe, 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, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

And so it was, that in the shadow of the mountain and in the shelter of the desert, God conscripted men into the army of Israel. Far from the battlefield the soldiers were counted and recorded. It was the first physical preparation God's army was making for war, (although there had been thirteen months of spiritual preparation.) The troops were being assembled and an army was being rallied, as the census was taken on that day at Mount Sinai. Here are the numbers of men listed from each tribe:

1. Reuben 46,500 soldiers

2. Simeon	59,300 soldiers
3. Gad	45,650 soldiers
4. Judah	74,600 soldiers
5. Issachar	54,400 soldiers
6. Zebulun	57,400 soldiers
7. Ephraim	40,500 soldiers
8. Manasseh	32,200 soldiers
9. Benjamin	35,400 soldiers
10. Dan	62,700 soldiers
11. Asher	41,500 soldiers
12. Naphtali	53,400 soldiers

The total number in Israel's army was 603,550 soldiers.

Twelve tribes were listed, but two names were missing. Which two sons of Jacob were not mentioned in the list? Levi! Where was the third-born son of Jacob? Where was the tribe of Levi? The men of the tribe of Levi were not counted along with the rest, because the LORD had said to Moses, "You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites." They were not to be soldiers in Israel's army; they were to be servants in God's house. They were not to carry the bloody weapons of war; they were to carry the holy articles for worship. "The Levites are mine," said the LORD. They would have their own census and they would have their own work. God said, "Appoint the Levites to be in charge of the Tabernacle of the Testimony - over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. They are to take care of it and encamp around it. Whenever the Tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the Tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death...The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the Tabernacle of the Testimony." The worship of God must not cease, even in midst of war. In the thick of the battle, some men would serve the LORD and the nation by fighting, but the Levites would serve the LORD and the nation by caring for the Tabernacle. The worship of God was the very heart and soul of Israel. It was a great honour, a vital task and a real duty for the Levites to serve in this way.

There was another name missing from the sons of Jacob. Joseph! Where was the favourite son of Jacob? Where was the tribe of Joseph? Remember that Joseph was given a double inheritance. Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were each numbered as a full tribe in Israel. With the tribe of Levi missing from the army, there would only have been eleven tribes left, except that Joseph was counted twice in his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which made it an even twelve again. God had taken care of every detail in the numbering of his people and the ordering of his army!

God then told Moses how the Israelite army was to camp and how

they were to march. The LORD said, "The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the Tabernacle of the Testimony, so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community." In the centre of Israel's camp was the LORD's Tabernacle. Surrounding the Tabernacle were the tents of the Levites, whose duty it was to guard and care for the house of the LORD. Then the rest of Israel, tribe by tribe, camped around the Tabernacle, like spokes radiating from the hub of a wheel. Except for the tribe of Levi, who was camped right next to the Tabernacle, all the other tribes were equally close to the LORD. Each tribe had its own flag, which fluttered proudly in its own section of the camp. We do not know what those tribal banners looked like. Perhaps the flags were different colours with different symbols. Perhaps each flag had a different animal on it, such as a lion on Judah's flag, a donkey on Issachar's flag, a serpent on Dan's flag, a deer on Naphtali's flag or a wolf on Benjamin's flag - according to the blessings that Jacob gave his sons before he died. (See Genesis 49.) Whatever those flags looked like, the LORD commanded, "The Israelites are to camp around the Tent of Meeting, some distance from it, each man under his standard with the banners of his family."

The LORD also told Moses which position each of the twelve tribes was to take, like the twelve numbers on a clock. God also arranged the tribes into four main divisions, like the four main points on a compass. There could be no grumbling or quarrelling about who should go first or who should go last, who should camp east or who should camp west - for God assigned to each tribe its own position.

EAST - The LORD said, "On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard...His division numbers 74,600." Judah was named first, not only because it was the largest tribe, but also because it was the most blessed tribe, the tribe from which Messiah would come. Two other tribes were assigned to the camp of Judah: The LORD said, "The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them...His division numbers 54,400. The tribe of Zebulun will be next...His division numbers 57,400." What was the total number of the eastern camp under Judah's commander? "All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, number 186,400." It was the strongest camp in Israel's army, with the greatest number of soldiers. When it was time to march, the LORD commanded, "They will set out first."

SOUTH - The LORD said, "On the south will be the divisions of the camp of Reuben under their standard...His division numbers 46,500." Although Reuben was not one of the largest of the tribes, Reuben was the oldest, the first-born son of Jacob - and so that tribe was honoured by being in command of the southern division. Two other tribes were assigned to the camp of Reuben: The LORD said, "The tribe of Simeon

will camp next to them...His division numbers 59,300. The tribe of Gad will be next. His division numbers 45,650.” What was the total number of the southern camp under Reuben’s commander? “All the men assigned to the camp of Reuben, according to their divisions, number 151,450.” The LORD commanded, “They will set out second.”

Next came the tribe of Levi. God commanded, “Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps.” In the centre of the marching army, came the tribe of Levi, carrying the LORD’s Tabernacle. Six tribes marched in front of Levi; six tribes marched behind him.

WEST - The LORD said, “On the west will be the divisions of the camp of Ephraim under their standard...His division numbers 40,500.” Ephraim was the third smallest tribe, in command of the two smallest tribes. Why was Ephraim picked to be a leader? Ephraim was not the largest or oldest tribe of Israel; no, but Ephraim was the most blessed son of Joseph, who was the best loved son of Jacob - so Ephraim was honoured by leading the western division of the army. The descendants of Rachel were appointed a place together by God. The LORD said, “The tribe of Manasseh will be next to them...His division numbers 32,200. The tribe of Benjamin will be next...His division numbers 35,400.” What was the total number of the smallest camp, the western camp, under Ephraim’s commander? “All the men assigned to the camp of Ephraim, according to their divisions, number 108,100.” The LORD commanded, “They will set out third.”

NORTH - The LORD said, “On the north will be the divisions of the camp of Dan, under their standard...His division numbers 62,700.” Dan was last, but not least. Dan was the second largest tribe in Israel and so he would be in command of the rear guard. The LORD said, “The tribe of Asher will camp next to them...His division numbers 41,500. The tribe of Naphtali will be next...His division numbers 53,400.” What was the total number of the northern camp, under Dan’s commander? “All the men assigned to the camp of Dan number 157,600.” The LORD commanded, “They will set out last, under their standards.”

So the Israelites did everything the LORD commanded Moses. That was the way they camped and that was the way they marched. Each man had his own place, where he camped and marched under the banner of his tribe, and each tribe had its own assigned place within Israel’s army. The men appointed by God to take the census were the same men appointed as officers to lead the tribal troops into battle. Everything and everyone was in place. Israel’s army had been put into fighting formation by the Great General of Israel’s army - God Himself!

The Book of Numbers reveals to us many attributes of our God:

1. He is the LORD of hosts, the LORD of armies. Christ is called

“Captain of the Host of the LORD” (KJV) or “Commander of the Army of the LORD” (Joshua 5:14) and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gathers His people into a mighty army! “I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and He was given a crown, and He rode out as a Conqueror bent on conquest...I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war...His Name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses...(Revelation 6:2 & 19:11-14).

2. He is a God who names and numbers. “He counts the number of the stars and calls them each by name” (Psalm 147:4). The LORD took great care to record every soldier, one by one, in the army of Israel because the life of every single person was important to God. Not one of His people can ever be lost, for we are all named and numbered and written in His Book of Life. “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered, so don’t be afraid” (Luke 12:7).

3. He is a faithful God, whose Word is True, who fulfills His Promises to us. Long ago, when Abraham was an old man with no children at all, God promised to make him into a great nation, with descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens or the sand on the seashore. At the time of this census in the history of Israel, we can see how God was keeping His Word. Behold the number of the sons of Abraham! They were an army now, numbering hundreds of thousands of men! One day the number of Abraham’s descendants would reach perfection and there would be “a great multitude that no one could count” (Revelation 7:9).