

NUMBERS: MOVING FORWARD AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Part I: God's Organizing His People

(Numbers 1:1-4:49)

I. Introduction

- A. "The principal lesson of Numbers is that God's people must walk by faith, trusting His promises, if they are to move forward" (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the Book of Numbers: Theme," p. 206), so avoiding spiritual stagnation and moving forward makes Numbers a timeless book for all of God's people!
- B. We thus view Numbers 1:1-4:49 on God's organizing His people that they might move forward for insight:

II. God's Organizing His People, Numbers 1:1-4:49.

- A. First, God organized Israel into a formidable military army to prepare her to conquer Canaan, Num. 1:1-54:
 - 1. God's call that the tribes be numbered involved the numbering of all the men in each tribe from the age of 20 and upward of those who were able to go to war, Numbers 1:1-3.
 - 2. This numbering was to be done by aligning every man with his clan, his father's house head by head (Numbers 1:2 ESV) so that each military group was composed of first a household, then of its associate households in the extended family and finally by its clan, a tight-knit bond needed for military comradery!
 - 3. The head of each tribe like generals helped Moses and Aaron number the warriors, Numbers 1:4-16.
 - 4. The total number of soldiers came to 603,550 men, a very formidable army! (Numbers 1:45-46)
 - 5. The men of the tribe of Levi were not to be numbered in this census, for their focus was not to be on war, but on serving God and His people in the tabernacle, Numbers 1:47-50a. Their duties would include caring for and moving the tabernacle furnishings as the nation traveled in the wilderness and in protecting the sanctity of the tabernacle's articles from contamination by non-Levites, Numbers 1:50b-54.
- B. Second, God organized Israel in her camping structure and march toward the Promised Land, Num. 2:1-34:
 - 1. On the eastern side of the tabernacle at a distance, the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were to camp, and this group would be the first group of tribes to move out when Israel marched, Numbers 2:1-9.
 - 2. On the southern side of the tabernacle at a distance, the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad were to camp, and this group would be the second group of tribes to move out when Israel marched, Numbers 2:10-16.
 - 3. The third group to move out would be the Levites who would follow the first two groups of tribes so that the tabernacle would be hemmed in from the front and behind by six tribes on each side, Numbers 2:17.
 - 4. The western side of the tabernacle at a distance, the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin were to camp, and they would follow the Levites in moving out when Israel marched, Numbers 2:18-24.
 - 5. The northern side of the tabernacle at a distance, the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali were to camp, and their group would be the last to move out when Israel marched, Numbers 2:25-34.
- C. Third, God organized Israel's Levites and priests as to their duties in ministering for Him, Numbers 3:1-4:49:
 - 1. The Lord directed that Aaron and his surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar were to be priests, Num. 3:1-4.
 - 2. Then, the Lord arranged for the rest of the men of the tribe of Levi to do the work of the tabernacle in helping these priests so the priests could function in their spiritual leadership of the nation, Num. 3:5-13.
 - 3. The Levites were then numbered and assigned their camp locations and responsibilities, Numbers 3:14-39:
 - a. The Gershonite clan of Levi camped close to the west side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the cloths, hides and curtains of the tabernacle and the curtain surrounding the tabernacle courtyard, 3:14-26.
 - b. The Kohathite clan of Levi camped close to the south side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the holy furnishings within the tabernacle, Numbers 3:27-32.
 - c. The Merarite clan of Levi camped close to the north side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the wood framework and fastenings of the tabernacle, Numbers 3:33-37.
 - d. Moses, Aaron and Aaron's sons camped close to the eastern side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the overall spiritual and religious supervision of the tabernacle, Numbers 3:38-39.
 - 4. The Levites were bound for life-long service to God based on His redemption of Israel's sons from Egypt, Num. 3:40-51. A Levite was to be between 30 and 50 years of age to serve in the tabernacle, Num. 4:1-3.
 - 5. In Numbers 4:4-49, God directed the respective duties of the Kohathite, Gershonite and Merarite clans of Levi in the order with which they were to take down and set up the tabernacle during Israel's marches!

Lesson: *God organized Israel that she might succeed in conquering Canaan and that He might relate well to her.*

Application: *God is a God of order, so may we live and worship Him in an orderly manner, 1 Corinthians 14:40.*