

1. As I started reading through the first several chapters of Numbers, I felt an overwhelming sense of intimidation. I've read this book many times and I've always made it through it before. Yet, as I discerned that God wanted me to teach this book, I kept thinking, how am I supposed to teach a book that is full of statistics? What's the spiritual lesson in learning that "x" number of Israelites came from this tribe and "y" number of Israelites came from that tribe? Does God just want us to memorize a bunch of numbers?" After a lot of study, my answer is now a definite no.
 - a) To explain why one should study Numbers and in particular the first couple of chapters, first I let me discuss the whole book and then I'll come back to Chapters 1-2.
 - b) I remember reading one time that the entire bible can be described as simple enough that a child can understand it, and complicated enough that one can spend their lifetime trying to unravel all of the different meanings within this book. That applies here. As best I can discern, my job today is to explain why God wanted to include all of these statistics.
 - i) My first response is that God does not want us to memorize "x" number of people come from group "x", and "y" number of people come from "group y".
 - ii) My second response is that He wants to teach us about preparing and getting organized for our journey through life. That is what will unfold in these chapters.
 - iii) My third response, which is my lesson title, is that these chapters explain why God wants us to get organized to make a difference for Him. My main subject of this lesson is about being a warrior for God. What that means is He calls upon us to live to make a difference for Him with our lives. The lessons are about how He wants us to be organized in order to be that type of person He wants us to be.
2. Before I go any further, it would probably be best to give the who, what, where's and why's of this book and then come back to the themes God wants us to learn in these first few chapters.
 - a) This book is called "Numbers" because it is full of well, numbers. It is full of statistics that would make anyone with a mathematical bent busy doing calculations for years. My goal is not to turn all of us into a bunch of "math majors", but to get us to understand why all of these numbers are listed in this book. With that said, let me explain further.
 - i) The Hebrew title for this book is translated "In the Wilderness". I think that is a better title, as it describes the years that the Israelites wandered in the wildness as they left Egypt and traveled to the land of Israel. The time covered in this book is about 40 years. This book effectively answers the question, "How did God get a multitude of people from Egypt into the land of Israel? What did they do during that time span, and why should I care?" That is what Numbers is, in a nutshell.
 - ii) Let me say a little more about the word "wilderness". Depending upon where one has lived, and traveled, we have different pictures of wilderness. In Numbers, it is describing a very hot, dry climate, where it is literally impossible to survive.
 - iii) It is one of those places in the world were very few people live and for a good reason. A few hours from where I live is a desert area appropriately named Death Valley. When I think of the wilderness, I think who would want to live in place that is named Death Valley? Know that the area the Israelites went through to get from Egypt to Israel is in effect a much less hospitable location than Death Valley.
 - b) The point for you and me (you knew this was coming), was not that it is God's desire for us to wander through lands that that are unfit for human survival. The point is our lives go through a series of trials where we often think, "How long do I have to deal with this?" God's answer is effectively, "Just because we are in our wilderness experience now, that does not mean we have to stay there forever." The point is God wants to lead us into a life of trusting Him to guide us. To get there, we have to let go of our old ways of living.

- c) That concept of getting through our wilderness is what Numbers is all about. The reason this book covers the time span of two generations is because both generations effectively describe our own lives. Think of the old generation as us trying to live our lives without trusting God to guide us. This second generation can represent for us learning a new way to live by trusting Him to guide every aspect of our lives.
 - i) OK John, most of reading this book are Christians and we get that concept. The point for us is by reading about how the Israelites learned to trust God through a difficult time ("wandering through a wilderness") we too can learn how to trust Him through our own "wilderness" times. The idea is in effect, "Just because we are temporarily stuck here, does not mean that God wants us to remain here."
 - ii) To put it another way, to drive from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, Nevada one has to drive through Death Valley. My point is just because one is in a "Death Valley", does not mean we have to stay there forever. Again, this is not a commentary on any particular location, just an illustration that I use to relate to wilderness.
- d) Meanwhile, I still haven't finished the who, what where and why's of this book.
 - i) The "who" are Moses and the Israelites. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament that includes Numbers. There are a lot of critics who claim that he did not write these books himself. I like to explain it this way: Jesus quoted from each of the first five Old Testament books. Jesus Himself claimed Moses was the author of those books. (See John 3:14 as an example of Jesus quoting from Numbers and claiming Moses is the author.) If you don't believe Jesus' words to be true, you have a much bigger problem than who wrote Numbers. ☺ Just accept the fact that I believe Moses is the author and is a main character here.
 - a) As to the Israelites, we will learn they counted over 600,000 adult men. If one adds for everyone else, the total would be is over two million people.
 - ii) I've discussed the "where", which is the desert area between the land of Israel and the land of Egypt. If one looks at a map, these two countries border each other. This wilderness is mostly east of what is today Israel. The book in effect starts just outside of Egypt and ends just outside of Israel in a desert place.
 - iii) The "when" is a period of about 40 years. Most scholars place the years at about 1445 BC through 1405 BC. As I promised, I don't want you to memorize numbers so don't get too obsessed with these dates. Just know that this historical event happened a long time ago. So how do we know a book this old is accurate? If someone is convinced a story is the word of God, it is usually copied carefully. The Jewish tradition of copying the text is to add up the numerical value of each letter (kind of like A=1, B=2, etc.) to make sure each page of the new copy of a page of the bible is exactly like the old one.
 - a) The oldest copies we have of the Old Testament go back over 2,000 years. (Which are the "Dead Sea Scrolls".) When you compare those scrolls to modern Old Testament text is very accurate with the differences being very minor technicalities. The evidence is that this story is accurate.
 - iv) The last question is "why". The basic answer is to understand how the Israelites got from Egypt to the Promised Land (land of Israel). If that is all God wanted us to learn here, the entire book could be summarized by the statement, "And then God miraculously made it possible for the Israelites to travel from Egypt into the land of Israel." The reason God wants us to study this book is to teach us how He wants to survive through our own wilderness moments in our lives. This about is effect about learning how to trust God through the most difficult times of our lives. If we grasp that concept, the book of Numbers is then worth studying.
 - v) With all of that background out of my system, I believe it is time to breakdown and actually start going verse by verse through the Book of Numbers.

3. Chapter 1, Verse 1: The LORD spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said:
²"Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one.
- a) To begin, I have to give you a time line of Israel's history leading up to this point:
 - i) Over 400 years earlier, God picked one man named Abraham to be the first Jewish person. He moved to the land of Israel but never owned any significant part of it.
 - ii) His grandson named Jacob had a total of 12 sons. Each of those 12 sons went on to start their own family and that became the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob, his sons and grandsons moved to Egypt. Four hundred years later, those tribes grew to a size of over 2,000,000 people. If the number of Israelites doubled in size about every 20 years, that large number of people was possible. After 400 years in Egypt, Moses, who was one of them, led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness.
 - a) There, that is most of the book of Genesis and Exodus in one paragraph.
 - iii) It has now been one year and one month since they left Egypt. In the last year, this group had the whole "God giving them the 10 commandments" experience. They also had an episode where the Israelites turned from God and built a golden calf. After punishment and repentance, they built a God-ordained structure to worship Him called the tabernacle. This was an expensive structure (with lots of gold and silver) that was portable. One of the 12 tribes of Israel was in charge of this thing.
 - a) That in effect, covers the first year and one month up to this date.
 - b) So why does Verse 1 give this specific date when the census took place? This is God's way of saying, "OK everyone, enough sitting around in the middle of the desert." It is time to get organized based on how I (God) wants them and us to get organized. To start, we need to count everyone to understand where each of them belongs in this group."
 - i) Notice the Israelites don't move until they wait on God's timing. The first thing one has to learn as a believer is to learn to hear God and wait on His timing.
 - ii) OK John, God has never spoken to me audibly. How do I know when it is time to move out of my desert? First of all, it does not involve sitting quietly and waiting for someone to speak to us. The reason God gave us His word is so we can know how to live our lives. The answer for us is "Keep moving and He will guide us." Since the Israelites didn't have a written book yet, He spoke to them directly.
 - c) With all of that background completed, I can now talk about these verses themselves. The specific command God gave Moses was to go count all of the Israelite men over 20 years of age who were able to fight in a war. OK, so why this command?
 - i) The answer is it lets all the Israelites know how many fighting men they have. It teaches them that wherever they are going to settle, they are going to have to fight the local inhabitants. This is about learning to be a warrior for God. That does not mean we have to go kill nonbelievers. It is about learning how we should make difference for God with our lives. In that sense, He calls on all of us to be warriors.
 - a) To be a biblical warrior, one has to accept the idea that living to make a difference for Jesus, in effect makes each of us warriors. To begin, we have to get organized by groups, which is why Chapter 1 reads the way it does.
 - b) Let me expand a little more on why we have to get organized by groups. Let's face it, this chapter could have just said, they counted all the fighting men and there were over 600,000. Why all of these details? By listing how many soldiers are from each tribe, it gives us the fact that God wants us to get organized by group. OK, so what? It is another reminder that living the Christian life was never meant to be a "million solo efforts". Yes, we are to seek His guidance for our lives, but He never desires that we work alone to make a difference for Him.

- d) Now that we understand it was God's desire for Moses to number all of the Israelite men for the logical assumption of preparing them for war, the next issue is "how":
 - i) To explain this, let me talk a little about how God spoke to Moses. I don't think it was a booming voice saying, "do this and don't do that". I believe God spoke to Moses the same way He sometimes communicates to us. In other words, we get an overwhelming urge to do something and when we obey that urge, we realize in hindsight we realize God is guiding our lives. I believe, Moses had this urge to go count all of the Israelites and he got his brother Aaron to help him.
 - ii) That is why Numbers records the specific date. Moses remembered "like it was yesterday" the idea he acted upon this command of God to go count.
4. Verse 3: You and Aaron are to count according to their divisions all the men in Israel who are twenty years old or more and able to serve in the army. ⁴One man from each tribe, each of them the head of his family, is to help you. ⁵These are the names of the men who are to assist you: from Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur; ⁶from Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai; ⁷from Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab; ⁸from Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar; ⁹from Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon; ¹⁰from the sons of Joseph: from Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud; from Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur; ¹¹from Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni; ¹²from Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai; ¹³from Asher, Pagi el son of Okran; ¹⁴from Gad, Eliasaph son of Deuel; ¹⁵from Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan. ¹⁶These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of the clans of Israel.
- a) It's just my personal view, but I don't think God told Moses all of these individual names. These were the men already designated as the leaders of each of the tribes of Israel. The way I visualize this happening is Moses had the idea of taking his brother, who was the chief priest of Israel and get the head guys from each tribe and start counting.
 - b) Time for some "whys": Why did Moses get his brother involved? Because his brother Aaron was already established as the spiritual leader of the nation of Israel while Moses was established as the civil leader. This count says in effect that God wants us to do this as a spiritual exercise as well as a command from their civil leader (Moses). The spiritual exercise had to do with learning to trust God to guide our lives as part of one's group.
 - i) So why were these two in charge? That is whom God ordained to be the leaders.
 - c) The next issue is why involve all of these tribal leaders. After all, Moses had all the time in the world on his hands. The reason for these other men was for identification. After all, Moses must have known all of the tribe leaders, but he didn't know everyone. The purpose of the tribal leaders was to verify in effect, "Yes this specific group or this specific man is one of ours, but this one over here is not."
 - d) It's now time for the first of many lessons on Israelite tribal divisions. To put it simply, even though there are 12 tribes of Israel, there are 13 tribes to choose from.
 - i) To explain, first understand that there were times when God wanted to exclude one of the tribes (usually the tribe of Levi) and still have 12 tribes.
 - ii) OK, why is God so obsessed with the number 12? The short answer is that it keeps it easy for division. If God wants an even number of tribes on all four sides of the tabernacle structure, 12 tribes is an easier number to work with than 13 tribes.
 - iii) To steal one of my favorite jokes on this topic, an old English pastor once made the joke, "If God had wanted us to use the metric system, He would have had 10 tribes of Israel and Jesus would have had 10 disciples. Since we have 12 of each, I prefer to use feet and inches when I measure things.
 - iv) This leads back to these verses. If one looks carefully at this list of tribes, the tribe of Levi was excluded. Why is that? As we will discover later in the chapter, this tribe was in charge of taking care of the tabernacle and because they had that job, they were excluded from going to war. Therefore, this tribe was not part of the 600,000 men who are about to be counted over the remainder of this chapter.

- e) This leads to the issue of "how does one get 12 tribes when there are only 11 left?" The answer is that one of the tribes had a "two for one stock split." (I had to sneak that joke in here somewhere. ☺) The answer goes back to the last few chapters of Genesis where one of Jacob's (the father of the 12 tribes) says that two of his grandsons are now his own sons. This means that those two grandsons now have equal rights with Jacob's other 11 sons.
 - i) Therefore, when God wanted to include the tribe of Levi in the 12 tribe count, the father of those two sons (Joseph) was counted. When the tribe of Levi was not counted, the two sons of Joseph were counted instead of Joseph.
 - ii) That is what we have here and that is what Verse 10 effectively states.
 - iii) With that said, it is time to start counting:
5. Verse 17: Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been specified, ¹⁸and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month. The people registered their ancestry by their clans and families, and the men twenty years old or more were listed by name, one by one, ¹⁹as the LORD commanded Moses. And so he counted them in the Desert of Sinai:
- a) Remember that we have about 2,000,000 people in the wilderness.
 - b) My first question is, how does one tell a group that large to all come together? Did Moses have a megaphone to call everyone? How exactly did he get their attention? Notice that the same day and month as mentioned in Verse 1 is mentioned again here. My point is however Moses did it, it happened that same day.
 - c) If there is one thing I have learned as a Christian is that when God wants me to do a thing, He makes it possible for me to do it. That means I suspect the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel had the urge to go walk and see Moses that day. I also suspect all of the individual family leaders underneath each of the head "twelve guys" had the urge to go discover the whereabouts of their tribal leaders. My point is simply that one way we can tell if God is guiding us to do something is it becomes possible for us to do that thing.
 - d) OK, so why just count the men who are 20 years old or older? Why not start with men who are 18 or 16? For whatever reason (maybe because 20 is an easy number to not mess up), God decided that the soldiers would be men who were of that age.
 - i) What if someone was say 98 years old? Were they counted with the others? The answer is if they were fit enough to fight, they were counted. I suspect that if a man was 20 and say, crippled, that man was not counted. My point is the reason I figure that there were about 2,000,000 Israelites wandering in the desert, is if one doubles the 600,000 plus that were counted (for the women) and add for children and those who could not be counted, one would easily hit this number.
 - ii) The next issue is what about non-Israelites? When the Israelites left Egypt, the book of Exodus (12:38) said a mixed multitude went with them. These other people probably figured, we have had enough of these plagues, we are joining the winning side. ☺ The point is God is only focusing on those who He called to fight on His behalf, who were the Israelites. The idea for you and me is the concept that if God has called on us to trust in Jesus for our salvation, He expects us to do something about that calling. That is what is being represented by the fighting. This is about being called as a Christian to make a difference for Jesus.
 - iii) But John, only men over 20 were called to fight. Does that mean if I am a woman or if I am under 20 I can't do anything to make a difference for Jesus? Of course not. The men were picked as throughout history, adult men were called to fight for the sake of their families, their relatives, and their "tribes" (so to speak). In effect when the fighting starts a generation later, the women had the tougher jobs of raising the children and taking care of those were unable to fight. Personally, I'm glad I am a man as I know my job is not nearly as important as my wife's.
 - iv) So what about women soldiers today? I'll leave that up to the armed forces. My point is simply anyone can be called by God no matter the age or either sex.

6. Verse 20: From the descendants of Reuben the firstborn son of Israel: 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.²¹ The number from the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.²² From the descendants of Simeon: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were counted and listed by name, one by one, according to the records of their clans and families.²⁴ The number from the tribe of Simeon was 59,300.²⁴ From the descendants of Gad: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.²⁵ The number from the tribe of Gad was 45,650.²⁶ From the descendants of Judah: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.²⁷ The number from the tribe of Judah was 74,600.²⁸ From the descendants of Issachar: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.²⁹ The number from the tribe of Issachar was 54,400.³⁰ From the descendants of Zebulun: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.³¹ The number from the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400.³² From the sons of Joseph: From the descendants of Ephraim: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.³³ The number from the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500.³⁴ From the descendants of Manasseh: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.³⁵ The number from the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.³⁶ From the descendants of Benjamin: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.³⁷ The number from the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.³⁸ From the descendants of Dan: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.³⁹ The number from the tribe of Dan was 62,700.⁴⁰ From the descendants of Asher: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.⁴¹ The number from the tribe of Asher was 41,500.⁴² From the descendants of Naphtali: All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, according to the records of their clans and families.⁴³ The number from the tribe of Naphtali was 53,400.⁴⁴ These were the men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family.⁴⁵ All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel's army were counted according to their families.⁴⁶ The total number was 603,550.

- a) In these 27 verses, we actually listed by tribe the number of men over the age of 20 who were Israelites and from one of these tribes. Personally, I have to wonder why the text does not simply say, Moses counted everyone with some help and total was a little over 600,000 as stated in Verse 46? Why have twenty-seven fairly repetitive verses that say in effect, when they counted from this tribe, the total was "x" and when they counted from that tribe the total was "y". Here we are living, roughly 3,500 years after this event. Why should we care how many fighting men came from each of those tribes?
 - i) The best answer I can give other than to show the literalness of this event is that God wants us to know that He is very aware of us as individuals. He knows our family background and to "whom we belong". Let me put it this way: I don't think God wants us to know that the adult-male head count was 53,400 from the tribe of Naphtali to use an example. He wants us to know that God not only cares about the leaders of Israel, but all of the individuals as well.
 - ii) Let me try this another way: God told Moses to go count these people. By listing them by tribal affiliation, we can see that Moses completed the task. Moses didn't just write, "About 600,000 more or less", He did what God commanded Him to do.
 - iii) The point for us is about learning obedience just as Moses performed here.

- b) So John, is that all there is to these 27 verses? Be obedient? No, but that's the main point. Moses was not only obeying God's orders, but also trying to teach the Israelites about how to be obedient to God. By counting everyone, Moses was saying, when all of us get to where God wants us to go, that land is not going to be empty. We are going to have to fight for it. Just because our god is God, He is not going to cause a great plague there so we can just march in and plant our behinds. ☺ So why did he want them to fight?
 - i) A big theme of this book is about learning to trust God during difficult times. That means having to fight our way through such times. That is the symbolism behind preparing for fighting. (Remember we are in Chapter 1 here.)
 - ii) I suppose the main point of these verses is simply that by counting individuals by their tribal affiliation, it gave everyone a sense of rank and status within the big scheme of things.
 - iii) But John, isn't this the same generation that wandered in the wilderness and God forbade them from entering the Promised Land? Yes, but that failure to act does not come up for several more chapters. Yes God knows all things. However, these Israelites at this point are still learning to trust God and develop obedience. One way to develop obedience is by learning to trust their God appointed leaders and go along with this number counting scheme.
- c) One bit of trivia, and then I will move on. Notice that each of the groups has a total number that is divisible by 100 or 50. My point is I do believe the count is rounded to the nearest "50", but who knows, maybe it is accurate to a person.
 - i) Meanwhile, it's time to talk about the one tribe that was not numbered.

7. Verse 47: The ancestral tribe of the Levites, however, was not counted along with the others.
⁴⁸ The LORD had said to Moses: ⁴⁹ "You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. ⁵⁰ Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law — 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. ⁵¹ 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 approaches it is to be put to death. ⁵² The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each of them in their own camp under their standard. ⁵³ The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the covenant law so that my wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the covenant law. "

- a) If you recall, God gave the order to number the Israelites on the first day of the second month since they left Egypt. Over the last month, the tabernacle (first Jewish worship structure) was built. The Levites were one of the 12 tribes of Israel and were not counted in the big "who can fight" census. (Don't forget the whole "13 possible tribes to use in order to have 12 tribes." That issue is important when we get to Chapter 2 in a moment.)
- b) Let me put it this way: If this portable worship structure was to be transported through the desert on the way to the Promised Land, it was going to take a large group of people who would know how to carefully assemble, disassemble and transport all of the pieces (there were lots) as God ordained the Israelites to do so in the Book of Leviticus. That is why a job for the Levites was to know how to transport this structure through the desert.
 - i) Another job of the Levites was to make sure only they could get near it. One of their jobs was to camp all around this structure in order to protect it. A point here is that the Levites were not numbered as part of the 600,000. Doing some quick math (you can't help that when studying Numbers ☺) if the total number of male Levites were similar in size to the other tribes, there should be roughly 50,000 of them. However, we will read in Chapter 3 that the number of Levite males from one month old upward was about 22,000. I'll save that number discussion for the next chapter. We have enough numbers to deal with about in this lesson.

- c) OK, so the Levites had this "don't touch or die" order to protect this structure. Tell me why I should care about this? How does this affect me?
 - i) The symbolism for Christians is the concept that God does call some of us to a full time duty of being a priest. In other words, many Christians are very happy just going to church once a week and maybe get involved in some ministry projects.
 - ii) For others, God calls them into the "professional" ministry. OK, that is stating the obvious. Let me explain it another way: The Levites were called to draw close to God. If one has experienced that calling, one is called to draw close to Him.
 - iii) Think of the definition of a priest. It is someone who helps people draw close to God and helps people to understand what God expects of them. A Levite is held to a higher standard in that God holds them accountable much more than the "lay person" of what God expects of those who want to follow Him.
 - iv) In the New Testament, James (3:1) warns us not to quickly become teachers, because teachers are held to a higher standard. What James meant by that statement is that if God calls us to be teachers of His word, God holds us to a higher standard as He expects us to teach it accurately. That doesn't mean a teacher has to be perfect, but a teacher must make the serious effort to seek God, study hard and prepare for teaching.
 - v) OK John, and what does any of that have to do with the Levites here in Chapter 1? The point is the reason they got the privilege of not having to fight with the other 600,000-plus men, is because God gave them a more difficult job. That job was not only to protect "God's presence" as represented by this structure, but also to teach the other Israelites how to God is to be worshipped. The other 600,000 men not only had to learn how to fight a physical battle, but understand that in order to say, make a sacrifice, one has to go through the Levite priestly system.
 - d) In case you are interested, Israelites today don't know what tribe they are from. In the year 70AD, the temple that kept the records of family names was destroyed. Therefore, Jewish people today don't know their tribal affiliation.
 - i) One does not have to be a Levite today to be a Jewish Rabbi (priest) as again, no modern Jew knows his or her tribal affiliation. With that said, there is one Jewish last name, most Jews believe is part of that tribe and many Jewish people with that last name do become rabbi's.
 - e) Now that I've given an overview of how we are to relate to the Levites, I can now get to the last verse in this chapter.
8. Verse 54: The Israelites did all this just as the LORD commanded Moses.
- a) If one studies the bible carefully, one notices that the text goes out of its way to commend obedience. This verse is a typical example of such. It is as if God is saying "I am so proud that these people did what I asked them to do, let me state that fact here and now".
 - b) The point for us is when we take the trouble to be obedient to God, I do believe He keeps records of such events and appreciates our obedience. That is the point here.
9. Chapter 2, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²"The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family."
- a) Let me warn you here that if you hate all of the numbers in the text in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 does not get any easier. The good news is like Chapter 1, I'm not going to focus on the numbers themselves, but the symbolism behind these events and how they affect us.
 - b) Let me summarize the key point of Chapter 2 right here. The main point of Chapter 1 was for Moses to find out how many Israelites could go to war. The last part of this chapter talked about why the tribe of Levite was exempt from being enlisted in the army and what was their function. With that background stated, Chapter 2 focuses on how and where each tribe is to camp out while out in the wilderness and when "marching".

- c) What is implied in this chapter is that up until this point, the Israelites camped out wherever they felt like it. In other words, there were about 2,000,000 camped out in the wilderness and probably not organized in any particular fashion up until this point.
 - d) Notice that each tribe was to camp a little distance from the tabernacle structure. If you recall from Chapter 1, the Levites were to camp around the tabernacle. What is implied is that everyone else must back up in order for the Israelites to have some room around the camp. Since I already gave one lecture this lesson about how the Levites were symbolic of those called into the professional ministry, I'll spare you a second lecture on that topic.
 - e) The other bit of trivia here is that each of the 12 other tribes had their own banner. There is lots of historical speculation as to what each banner looked like, but since it is not stated in the text, I won't comment on those possibilities any further.
 - i) So why are the banners mentioned? So the average Israelite would know where to camp. Let's say a person got lost somewhere among the 2,000,000 people. How that person would find their way back to where he or she should be was to look for the banner of that person's tribe. In other words, each tribe was to make a banner and put it up high, so people would know where "home" was for them.
 - f) Also notice in these verses that God spoke to both Moses and Aaron about how the tribes were to be organized. God spoke to both of them because it is both a spiritual exercise (again, Aaron was the spiritual leader) as well as an exercise in how our lives in general are to be organized (again Moses was the civil leader). The point for us is wherever God calls us to serve Him, (be it our local church, community, or mission group), he wants us organized for the purpose of serving Him wherever we happen to be living.
 - g) Now that we know that the Israelites are to organize around the tabernacle with the tribe of Levi being closest to the tabernacle, it is time to describe where each tribe was to be:
10. Verse 3: On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard. The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁴ His division numbers 74,600. ⁵ The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁶ His division numbers 54,400. ⁷ The tribe of Zebulun will be next. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. ⁸ His division numbers 57,400. ⁹ All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, number 186,400. They will set out first. ¹⁰ On the south will be the divisions of the camp of Reuben under their standard. The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of Shedeur. ¹¹ His division numbers 46,500. ¹² The tribe of Simeon will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Simeon is Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ¹³ His division numbers 59,300. ¹⁴ The tribe of Gad will be next. The leader of the people of Gad is Eliasaph son of Deuel. ¹⁵ His division numbers 45,650. ¹⁶ All the men assigned to the camp of Reuben, according to their divisions, number 151,450. They will set out second.
- a) First of all, I don't believe God wants us to memorize a bunch of names and numbers here. It is the ideas behind these names and numbers that God wants to understand.
 - b) Let me explain some key points here:
 - i) Visualize looking down from an airplane two million people camped out. In the center of this campground is the tabernacle structure. Surrounding and protecting the tabernacle is one group of about 22,000 men (as we will read in Chapter 3) and their families of the tribe of Levi.
 - ii) To the east of this group are three more groups. These three groups total 186,400 people and they are all to camp to the east of the main group. The tribe of Judah is to be the leader of the group. Remember that the Messiah (Jesus) came from this tribe. Think of the fact that the rising of the sun comes from the easterly direction.
 - a) The idea is to look to "Judah" to start off the "new day" just as the Promised Messiah will come to guide the way we should go. Just as Jesus is to guide our lives, we look to Him to lead us on our "new journey" on a "new day".

- c) After the three tribes that are lined up to east, next comes three more tribes lined up to the south. That is what Verses 10 through 16 are talking about.
 - i) Let me try to help visualize the text for us. When the Israelites camped around the tabernacle, there were three tribes to the east, as we just described, three more to the south, and we will read in a few more verses there were three more camped to the west and the final three tribes were to the north. In summary the 12 tribes of Israel camped around the central object, which was the tabernacle.
 - ii) Many diagrams of this camping show four "Capital T's with the bottom point of each capital "T" sort of touching each other. The problem I have with that layout is that there is not enough room for the top portion of the letter "T". If the camp is laid out exactly that way, the tribes might overlap.
 - a) I heard a cute illustration on this: To understand the layout, you have to think Jewish: When the text says, "three tribes camp to the east", I picture a single line where the people of the three easterly tribes line up exactly to the east. Then the other three groups camp form three other lines, facing the south, then the west and north respectively. Therefore, I sort of see all of this as seen from an airplane, as a giant cross. I'll come back to this.
 - b) In the meantime, we need to describe the rest of the camp.
- 11. Verse 17: Then the tent of meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. They will set out in the same order as they encamp, each in their own place under their standard. ¹⁸ On the west will be the divisions of the camp of Ephraim under their standard. The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of Ammihud. ¹⁹ His division numbers 40,500. ²⁰ The tribe of Manasseh will be next to them. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ²¹ His division numbers 32,200. ²² The tribe of Benjamin will be next. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideon. ²³ His division numbers 35,400. ²⁴ All the men assigned to the camp of Ephraim, according to their divisions, number 108,100. They will set out third. ²⁵ On the north will be the divisions of the camp of Dan under their standard. The leader of the people of Dan is Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶ His division numbers 62,700. ²⁷ The tribe of Asher will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Okran. ²⁸ His division numbers 41,500. ²⁹ The tribe of Naphtali will be next. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira son of Enan. ³⁰ His division numbers 53,400. ³¹ All the men assigned to the camp of Dan number 157,600. They will set out last, under their standards. ³² These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All the men in the camps, by their divisions, number 603,550
 - a) If all of these names and numbers seem a bit repetitive, know that I completely agree.
 - b) Here are some key facts that do repeat: The total number of Israelite males over the age of 20 is listed in Chapter 1 and again here in Chapter 2 (Verse 32). The point is God is telling those men over 20 that in effect, "you are in charge of your families and you must camp out the way I command you to camp out." The issue is not camping, but obedience.
 - i) The other thing that repeats from Chapter 1 is the names of the leaders of each of the twelve tribes. It is as if God is saying, "Since you are the leaders of your tribes, you are to make sure everyone in your group is camping where you should be.
 - ii) By listing all of these names and numbers, God is saying in effect, "I care about each and every one of the people who are willing to take a stand for me." I care about each "warrior", no matter how old, as long as such people are willing to be obedient to me and let me guide their lives.
 - c) The other way to understand all of this is that it is not just about how the Israelites were to camp around the tabernacle, it is also about how they are to be on the move:
 - i) The point is when God wants the Israelites to move from "Point A to Point B", the three tribes to the east go first, then comes the three to the south, then comes the tabernacle itself surrounded by the tribe of Levi, then comes the three to the west and finally the three to the north. This is about doing things in an orderly fashion.

- ii) This leads to another good question: Why have God's presence in the middle of this march? After all, if God is leading the Israelites through the desert, shouldn't the tabernacle be leading the parade and not in the middle of it?
 - a) One can understand why all the tribes camp around this structure. That way, each believer is looking for God to guide their lives and therefore, the tabernacle should be in the middle of the camp. My question is when they are on the march, why isn't the Levites leading the march? After all, if God is God, there should not be any danger to having the Levites lead.
 - b) The first answer is the practical reason: If the Israelites are to be attacked, the most valuable possession is in the middle of the camp and that is a better protection point against being attacked.
 - c) The answer for you and me is the fact that "Judah" leads the way. Again, the promised Messiah for Israel (who we call Jesus) is in effect leading the parade as they march to their next point. The idea is we look to Jesus to lead us where we are going. OK, if that is true, why is the tabernacle back in the middle of this procession if that is symbolically where God is?
 - (1) The answer comes back to our roles as "warriors". In effect all Christians are called to be warriors. It is not about physical fighting as much as it is about being willing to take a stand for God. Yes the "tribe of Judah" leads the way, but at the same time, we must be willing to defend what it is we believe in. That is why the presence of God is within the midst of us, and in the middle of the pack.
- d) Let me back up and talk a little more about the big picture: Why does the text spend so much space giving us individual names of tribal leaders and the specific count of how many Israelites are in each tribe? Is God trying to bore us to death with numbers and names? Hardly. The point is not about memorizing a bunch of ancient facts. The point is about understanding our roles as "warriors" with God guiding our lives.
 - i) Jon Curson had a reference here I liked. He said, "If the text appears to be dry, try putting some of one's own sweat into the text in order to moisten it". That is what is required here in order to understand these two chapters.
 - a) The point is not to know how a bunch of Israelites who lived thousands of years ago camped out or how they marched. It is to understand how God cares about us as both individuals and communities. The idea is that He is both the center of our lives and the one who leads us as to where He wants us to go. That is why the tribe of Judah leads the procession (the tribe that Jesus came from) and at the same time, the presence of God (symbolic of the tabernacle) is in the middle of this group.
 - b) The point is God wants us to follow Him both as individuals and as part of a community. He is aware of the exact number of our communities that do make a difference for Him. He wants to lead us to make a difference for Him, which is what being a biblical "warrior" is all about.
 - ii) Let me give you one more visual before I wrap this up. I said earlier that when this group camped around the tabernacle, three groups were to the east, three to the south, west and north. Personally I don't visualize four capital "T's" meeting at a central point, but more like four capital "T's" meeting at a point. (At least from the view of an airplane, looking down at this camp).
 - a) If one looks at the total number of people to the north and south, they were about equal (about 150,000 each). The group to the east was the largest at roughly 185,000 (Verse 8). The three tribes that camped to the west, was the smallest at roughly 108,000 (Verse 24). My point is from the sky, this campout looked like a giant cross. I'll let you ponder it from there.

12. Verse 33: The Levites, however, were not counted along with the other Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses.
- a) It would have been great to end this lesson with that picture of the giant cross moving in the wilderness, but we still have two verses left. This verse reminds us that the tribe of Levi was not counted among the 600,000 men (ok, a little more than that) who were the warriors listed amongst the 12 tribes.
 - b) Remember that the job of the Levites was to assemble, work, take down, transport and protect the tabernacle, so they were exempt from being "warriors".
 - i) Does this mean that if one is in the "professional ministry" as these Levites' were, then one is not a warrior for God? While I'm at it, what those were not numbered such as women and children, are they not warriors?
 - ii) The answer in context is that everyone else other than the 600,000 "warriors" still were called to make a difference for God, but their roles were different. Just as God calls the "layman" to a different assignment than someone in the professional ministry, so He calls each one of us to make a difference for Him.
 - c) OK, John, the whole lesson, you have beating the point about being a warrior for God and about being in the full time ministry. What specifically, does God want me to do with my life? To begin, we should use the most valuable asset we have, our time in order to make a difference for Him with our lives. That is what a "warrior" is. I'm not saying one has to give up one's present job or current lifestyle. God may be calling us to be witness for Him through our present situation. The point is to use what talents and gifts God has given us in order to make that difference for Him with our lives.
 - i) In effect, this whole lesson is all about numbering believers so that we know that we are called by Him to make a difference for Him. If one does not know what God has specifically called you to do, pray about it and even ask others what are our best talents that we can use for Him. One of the great joys in life is figuring out how we can use our talents to make that difference for Him. Then, and only then, one becomes a warrior for God in order to make a difference for Him.
13. Verse 34: So the Israelites did everything the LORD commanded Moses; that is the way they encamped under their standards, and that is the way they set out, each of them with their clan and family.
- a) I stated earlier in this lesson that God goes out of His way to commend obedience. That is what we have here in this last verse. This verse is saying that Moses obeyed God by having everyone camp and march as ordered and the Israelites obeyed Moses.
 - b) Let me put it this way: If this verse was not here, we would not know whether or not the Israelites obeyed God's order to camp and march as He desired them and us to do.
 - c) OK John, does all of this mean God wants all the Christians in our community to go camp around our church or march in a certain order? If you think that, you may need to read this lesson again. The idea is not about how we are to camp or march. The idea for us is about God being the center of our lives (His Presence is in the middle of the camp) and He is also leading us where He wants us to go, which is why the tribe of Judah was the leader in terms of camping towards a "new day" (i.e., towards the east) and also the same tribe of Judah leads the procession as we go through life. That is a word picture for Jesus, who is from the tribe of Judah leading us as we go make a difference for Him.
 - d) With that said, it's time for the closing prayer:
14. Heavenly Father, Help us to see You as both being in the center of our lives as well as the one who leads us to where You want us to go. Help us to be good warriors for You, by using our lives to make a difference for You. Help us to seek You as to what You desire for our lives today. Guide us through whatever it is we have to deal with. Help us to remember that You are always in the midst of us as well as leading us. Help us to work both as individuals and as a community in order to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.