

# *Numbers*

## *Lesson #2*

### *“Count ‘em Up”—the 1<sup>st</sup> Census*

*(1: 1 – 3: 51)*

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

# Review

**In Lesson #1 we reviewed the linear nature of Scripture, as the full Septuagint canon presents it, Genesis through Revelation. In its final canonical form Scripture moves in a straight line across time, with periodic recapitulation, knit tightly together with a set of recurring images such as water, fire, oil, and so on. In this sprawling narrative, God is the main character, sin is the conflict and redemption is the theme.**

**After reviewing Scriptures' overall structure, we dropped in on the Israelites at the end of Leviticus. The Israelites had left Egypt 13 months earlier, and at Mt. Sinai God had reaffirmed his covenant with his people and given them the law and the tabernacle: in Leviticus he taught them how to apply the law and how to use the tabernacle.**

**We then introduced Numbers, understanding its 3-part structure, and we looked closely at the story of "Balaam and his Talking Ass" to discern how narrative operates in Numbers.**

**Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM**

# Preview

**The Israelites left Egypt in 1446 B.C. a frightened, undisciplined mob of ex-slaves. As we enter Numbers we organize the mob, counting them by tribe, clan and family, and organizing the 603,550 men and their families around the tabernacle in an orderly fashion, with the pillar of cloud and fire hovering above the holy of holies, watching them, preparing to lead them to the Promised Land of Canaan.**

**What might seem like a tedious exercise in census taking produces extraordinary results: by the time the counting is complete, every Israelite knows who he is, where he belongs, and what he's supposed to do—all relative to God.**

**Would that we might be so fortunate!**

**“In the second year after the Israelites’ departure from the land of Egypt, on the first day of the second month, the Lord said to Moses at the tent of meeting in the wilderness of Sinai: ‘Take a census of the whole community of the Israelites, by clans and ancestral houses, registering by name each male individually. You and Aaron shall enroll in companies all the men in Israel of twenty years or more who are fit for military service.’”**

**(1: 1-3)**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



When the Israelites left Egypt they were little more than a disorganized mob of ex-slaves, afraid of their own shadows. Recall what happened at the Red Sea when the Israelites realized they were being chased by the Egyptian army:

*“The Egyptians pursued them—all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, his horsemen, and his army—and caught up with them as they lay encamped by the sea, at Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.*

*“Now Pharaoh was near when the Israelites looked up and saw that the Egyptians had set out after them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the Lord. To Moses they said, ‘Were there no burial places in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?’”*

(Exodus 14: 9-11)

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**Forging this cowardly, motley crew into a fighting force capable of defeating a formidable enemy who is defending their homeland won't be easy.**

**The first step is for the Lord and Moses to count 'em up, organize them into fighting battalions and see what material they have to work with.**

**The census serves a 2<sup>nd</sup> literary purpose, as well, providing a "pass in review" for the reader, a look at the size and composition of each tribe's manpower and prowess (or lack of prowess, as the case may be).**



**We have a similar scene in Homer's *The Iliad*, when Homer invokes the Muses to help him describe the great gathering of armies:**

*"Sing to me now, you Muses who hold the halls of Olympus! You are goddesses, you are everywhere, you know all things—all we hear is the distant ring of glory, we know nothing—who were the captains of Achaea? Who were the kings? The mass of troops I could never tally, never name, not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, a tireless voice and the heart inside me bronze, never unless you Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus whose shield is rolling thunder, sing, sing in memory all who gathered under Troy. Now I can only tell the lords of the ships, the ships in all their numbers!"*

*First came the Boeotian units led by Leitus and Peneleos . . .*

**(II, 573-584)**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



And there's another scene in *The Iliad* where Helen, who caused the Trojan war by betraying her Achaean husband Menelaus and running off with Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy, sits with king Priam and surveys the enemy troops:

*“Come over here, dear child. Sit in front of me, so you can see your husband of long ago, your kinsmen and your people . . . Here, come closer, tell me the name of that tremendous fighter. Look, who's that Achaean there, so stark and grand? Many others afield are much taller, true, but I have never yet set eyes on one so regal, so majestic . . .”*

(III, 196-207)

Together, Priam and Helen view the Achaean troops on the battlefield, and Helen provides a running commentary on each of the key warriors in the story.



The census in Numbers is far more prosaic than the heroic iambic hexameter verse of *The Iliad*, but it serves much the same purpose. With military precision, the Lord directs Moses to appoint a man from each tribe to assist with the count:

### Tribe

Reuben  
Simeon  
Judah  
Issachar  
Zebulun  
Ephraim  
Manasseh  
Benjamin  
Dan  
Asher  
Gad  
Naphtali

### Assistant

Elizur, son of Shedeur  
Selumiel, son of Zurishaddai  
Nahshon, son of Amminadab  
Nethanel, son of Zuar  
Eliab, son of Helon  
Elishama, son of Ammihud  
Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur  
Abidan, son of Gideoni  
Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai  
Pagiell, son of Ocran  
Eliasaph, son of Reuel  
Ahira, son of Enan

“These were the elect of the community, leaders of their ancestral tribes, heads of the clans of Israel. So Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by name, and assembled the whole community on the first day of the second month. Every man of twenty years or more then registered individually his name and lineage according to clan and ancestral house, as the Lord had commanded Moses. So he enrolled them in the wilderness of Sinai.”

(1: 16-19)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



**With the leaders in place and the logistics worked out, the count begins:**

*“Of the descendants of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, registered individually by name and lineage according to their clans and ancestral houses, every male of twenty years of more, everyone fit for military service: those enrolled from the tribe of Reuben were forty-six thousand five hundred.”*

**(1: 20-21)**

**This same pattern recurs for each of the twelve tribes, and here are the results:**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Assistant</u>
Reuben	46,500
Simeon	59,300
Judah	74,600
Issachar	54,400
Zebulun	57,400
Ephraim	40,500
Manasseh	32,200
Benjamin	35,400
Dan	62,700
Asher	41,500
Gad	45,650
Naphtali	<u>53,400</u>
Total	603,550



Notice that Judah is the largest tribe, with 74,600 and Manasseh the smallest, with 32,200.

Notice, too, that the tribe of Levi is missing. Instead, the two sons of Jacob's favorite son Joseph are given one tribe each: Ephraim and Manasseh. This reflects Jacob's blessing on Joseph:

*"Jacob then said to Joseph: 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessing me, he said, 'I will make you fertile and multiply you and make you into an assembly of peoples, and I will give this land to your descendants after you as a permanent possession.' So now your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I joined you here, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine as much as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Progeny born to you after them shall remain yours; but their heritage shall be recorded in the names of their brothers.'"*

**(Genesis 48: 3-6)**

**Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM**



**The Levites are not included among the “men fit for military service,” for they will have a different job, serving at the tabernacle.**

**Likewise, the Levites will receive no land as their inheritance, for “the Lord himself is [their] portion” (Deuteronomy 10: 9), although the Levites will receive 48 cities with their surrounding pasturelands in which they will live (Numbers 35: 6-7).**

“Now the Levites were not enrolled by their ancestral tribe with the others. For the Lord had told Moses, ‘The tribe of Levi alone you shall not enroll nor include in the census along with the other Israelites. You are to give the Levites charge of the tabernacle of the covenant with all its equipment and all that belongs to it. It is they who shall carry the tabernacle with all its equipment and who shall be its ministers; and they shall camp all around the tabernacle. When the tabernacle is to move on, the Levites shall take it down; when the tabernacle is to be pitched, it is the Levites who shall set it up. Any unauthorized person who comes near it shall be put to death. The other Israelites shall camp according to their companies, each in their own divisional camps, but the Levites . . .

“. . . shall camp around the tabernacle of the covenant to ensure that God's wrath will not fall upon the Israelite community. The Levites shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the covenant. The Israelites complied; they did just as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

(1: 47-54)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



When God said that only the Levites may work with the tabernacle and its articles, and that “any unauthorized person who comes near it shall be put to death” (1: 51), he meant it.

When David becomes king 500 years later in 1010 B.C., to support his claim to the kingship he has the ark of the covenant moved up to his palace in Jerusalem. Here’s the scene:

*“They transported the ark of God on a new cart and took it away from the house of Abinadab on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the cart, with Ahio walking before it, while David and all the house of Israel danced before the Lord with all their might, with singing and with lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals, As they reached the threshing floor of Nodan, Uzzah stretched out his hand to the ark of God and steadied it, for the oxen were tipping it. Then the Lord became angry with Uzzah; God struck him on that spot and he died there in God’s presence . . . . David became frightened of the Lord that day . . . .”*

**(2 Samuel 6: 3-7)**

**Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM**



Giulio Quaglio the Younger. *Uzzah and the Ark* (medallion), 1704.  
Ljubljana Cathedral, Slovenia.

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**Now that we have counted the Israelites by tribe, clan and family, it's time to organize them.**

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: ‘The Israelites shall camp, each in their own divisions, under the ensigns of their ancestral houses. They shall camp at some distance all around the tent of meeting. Encamped on the east side, toward the sunrise, shall be the divisional camp of Judah in companies. The leader of the Judahites is Nahshon, son of Amminadab, and the enrollment of his company is seventy-four thousand six hundred. Encamped beside it is the tribe of Issachar. The leader of the Issacharites is Nethanel, son of Zuar, and the enrollment of his company is fifty-four thousand four hundred. Also the tribe of Zebulun. The leader of the Zebulunites is Eliab, son of Helon, and the enrollment of his company is fifty-seven thousand four hundred. The total enrollment of the camp of Judah by companies is one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred. They shall be first on the march.

(2: 1-9)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



### East Side

Judah	74,600
Issachar	54,400
Zebulun	<u>57,400</u>
	<b>186,400</b>

### South Side

Reuben	46,500
Simeon	59,300
Gad	<u>45,650</u>
	<b>151,450</b>

### West Side

Ephraim	40,500
Manassah	32,200
Benjamin	<u>35,400</u>
	<b>108,100</b>

### North Side

Dan	62,700
Asher	41,500
Naphtali	<u>53,400</u>
	<b>157,600</b>

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

“These are the enrollments of the Israelites according to their ancestral houses. The total enrollment of the camps by companies is six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty. The Levites, however, were not enrolled with the other Israelites, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. The Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses; both in camp and on the march they were in their own divisions, everyone by clan and according to ancestral house.”

(2; 32-34)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

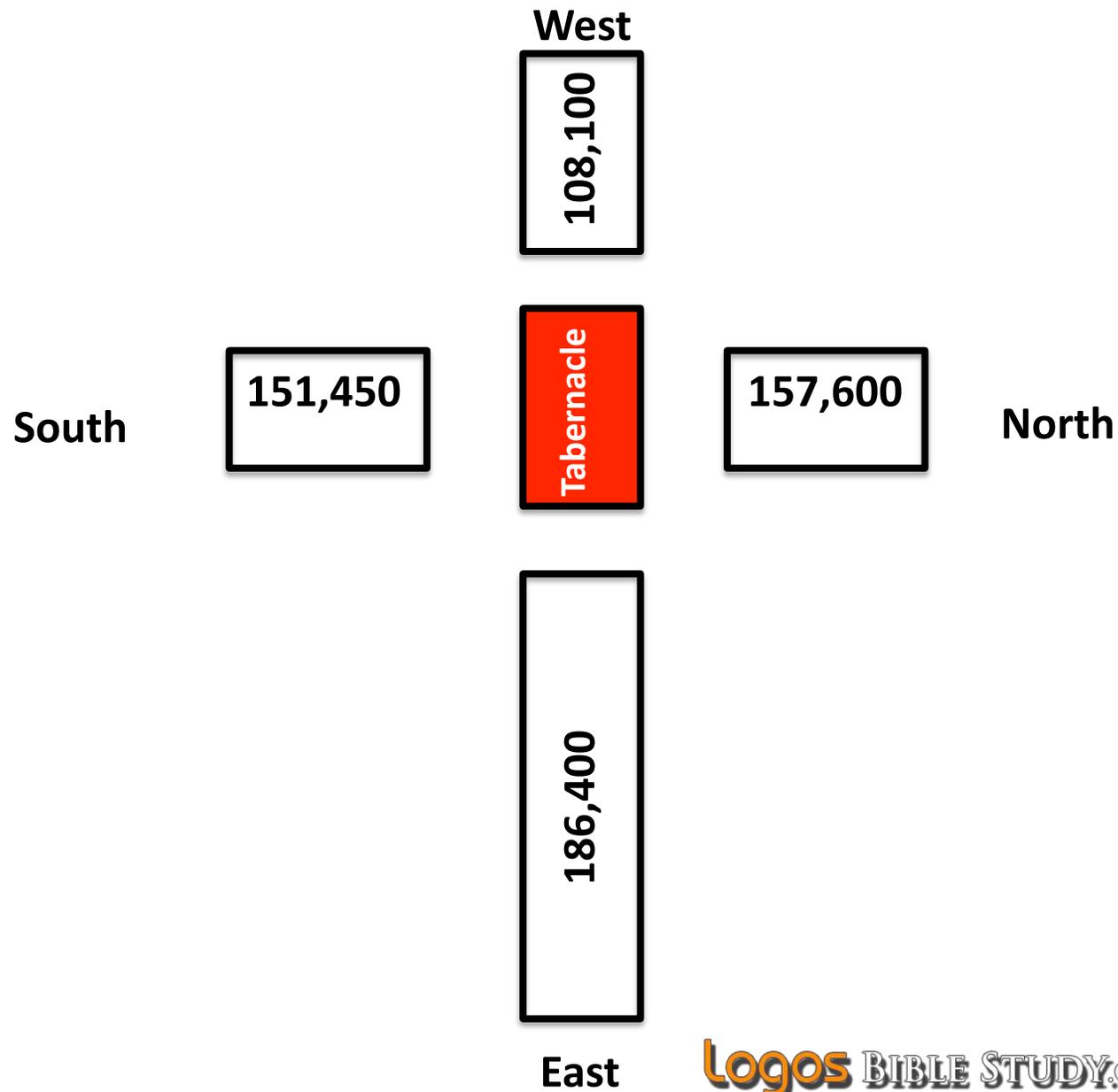


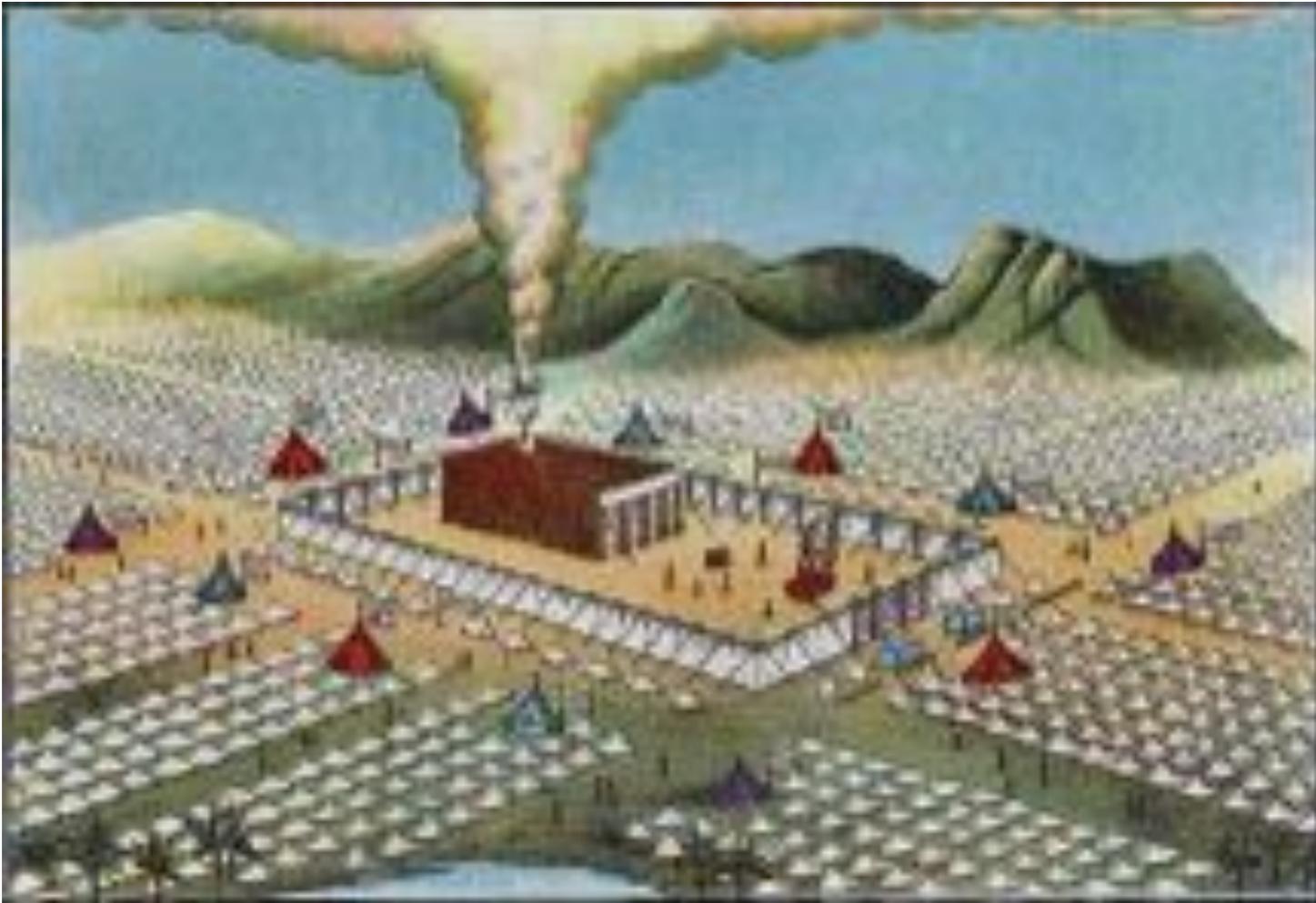
All of this counting leads us to a remarkable visual possibility. Take a look at how the tribes would actually camp around the tabernacle on the floor of the desert.

Am I late for class?  
I was napping.



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM





**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**How cool  
is that!**



**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



## Now we turn to the priests and Levites:

*“These are the offspring of Aaron and Moses at the time the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. These are the names of Aaron’s sons: Nadab, the firstborn, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of Aaron’s sons, the anointed priests whom he ordained to serve as priests. But Nadab and Abihu died in the presence of the Lord when they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai; and they left no sons. So only Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of their father Aaron.”*

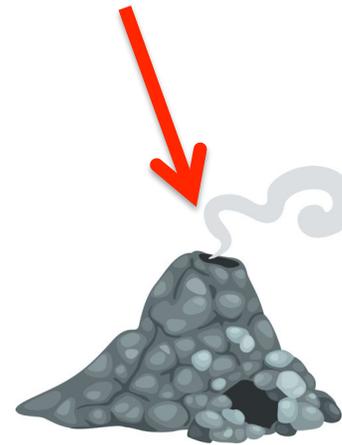
**(3: 1-4)**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



Do you remember Nadab & Abihu, toasted before the Lord for offering "unauthorized fire"?

Nadab & Abihu



“Now the Lord said to Moses: Summon the tribe of Levi and station them before Aaron the priest to serve him. They shall discharge his obligations and those of the whole community before the tent of meeting by maintaining the tabernacle. They shall have responsibility for all the furnishings of the tent of meeting and discharge the obligations of the Israelites by maintaining the tabernacle. You shall assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they have been assigned unconditionally to him from among the Israelites. But you will appoint only Aaron and his descendants to exercise the priesthood. Any unauthorized person who comes near shall be put to death . . . . I hereby take the Levites from the Israelites in place of every firstborn that opens the womb among the Israelites . . . .

“ . . . The Levites, therefore are mine, because every firstborn is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated to me every firstborn in Israel, human being and beast alike. They belong to me; I am the Lord.

(3: 5-13)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



The Lord sets apart the entire tribe of Levi for work at the tabernacle, but not all Levites are priests—only the descendants of Aaron.

The other Levites will fulfill various functions at the tabernacle, including caring for the tabernacle's furniture, its utensils, the boards and coverings, packing it up for travel and reassembling it.



The Lord then takes a census of the Levites, the clans organized by the sons of Jacob's son Levi and his descendants:

## Levi

### Gershon

Libni

Shimei

### Kohath

Amram

Izhar

Hebron

Uzziel

### Merari

Mahli

Mushi

**Total Levites:**  
**22,273**

These are the clans of the Levites, and each will have specific duties regarding the tabernacle.

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**With the Levites counted,  
the Lord next speaks of  
the redemption of the 1<sup>st</sup>  
born.**

“The Lord then said to Moses: Enroll every firstborn male of the Israelites a month old or more, and count the number of their names. Then take the Levites for me—I am the Lord—in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites, as well as the Levites’ cattle, in place of all the firstborn among the cattle of the Israelites. So Moses enrolled all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the Lord had commanded him. All the firstborn males, registered by name, of a month or more, numbered twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three.”

(3: 5-13)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



**Here's how "redemption" works. All firstborn males, those who open the womb, belong to the Lord. In place of each firstborn male, a Levite replaces him, thus "buying back" the firstborn male.**

**Our redemption in Christ works in the same way: by Christ, our great high priest, offering himself on the cross on our behalf, we are "bought back," as he pays our redemption price on our behalf.**



**By taking the census the Lord organizes the Israelite community, the first step in preparing them for the conquest of the Promised Land.**

**Think of the 40 years in the wilderness as Marine Corps boot camp. The Israelites are called to live a life of “honor, courage and commitment,” and to prevail in battle under the harshest of conditions.**

**The training will not be pleasant, and the Lord will be a very demanding Drill Instructor!**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

# Questions for discussion and thought

1. What is the primary reason for taking a census at the beginning of Numbers?
2. The tribe of Levi is omitted from the census, yet there are still 12 tribes counted. How is this possible?
3. How many censuses are mentioned in the Bible?
4. The Levites have specific duties to perform. What are they?
5. We saw that the Levites “redeem” the firstborn Israelites, and Christ “redeems” us. Can you think of other examples of “redemption” today?

## **Copyright © 2015 by Logos Educational Corporation**

**All rights reserved. No part of this course—audio, video, photography, maps, timelines or other media—may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval devices without permission in writing or a licensing agreement from the copyright holder.**