

14. If God had pledged to fight their battles for the Israelites, why did the instructions state that those to be counted should be "able to go to forth to war"?
15. Suggest some methods by which Moses and Aaron might implement their task of tallying the "head count".
16. Can you think of any reason that the census did not specify an age beyond which the men were not to be counted?

## II. THE GENERAL CENSUS (1:5-46)

### A. TRIBAL HEADS SELECTED vv. 5-16

#### TEXT

Chapter 1:5. And these are the names of the men that shall stand with you: of the tribe of Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur. 6. Of Simeon; Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. 7. Of Judah: Nahshon the son of Amminadab. 8. Of Issachar; Nethaneel the son of Zuar. 9. Of Zebulun; Eliab the son of Helon. 10. Of the children of Joseph: of Ephraim; Elishama the son of Ammihud: of Manasseh; Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. 11. Of Benjamin; Abidan the son of Gideoni. 12. Of Dan; Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. 13. Of Asher; Pagiel the son of Ocran. 14. Of Gad; Eliasaph the son of Deuel. 15. Of Naphtali; Ahira the son of Enan. 16. These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 1:5. And these are the names of the men who shall stand with you: from the tribe of Reuben, Elizur, son of Shedeur; 6. from Simeon, Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai; [from here through verse 15, the text differs little enough from the previously-printed KJV that such redundancy does not warrant repetition] 16. These were the distinguished men of the assembly, princes of their fathers' tribes, and heads of the thousands of Israel.

## COMMENTARY

Names were always rich and meaningful to the Hebrews. Of the 24 given in this list, exactly half invoke some form of reference to God (El-, el, shad-, shed-). The names often inspired their possessors to expend every effort to be worthy of bearing them. Thus Elizur, or "My God is a rock"; and Shedeur, "The Lord is a light"; Shelumile, "My friend is God";—in each case the bearer was inspired constantly to be and do his very best.

Although the men here listed are but names for us, each man was one of esteem among his people; each was the first-born of his household. One on the list had derived his name from the Egyptian god Ra (Ahira, v. 15); and we might marvel at the small proportion of such an influence after the centuries of enslavement. Only two of the names (Nahshon, an ancestor in the lineage of Jesus Christ, and Amminadab, father of Nahshon) appear again in the Bible; they are named in Ruth 4:20, as well as in Matthew 1:4 and Luke 3:32, 33. These are the men who will be consulted on important decisions to be made in tribal and national affairs. They head the *alaphim*, or large units (sometimes translated 'thousands').

## QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

17. Of how much influence is a man's name upon his character and conduct? Can you cite any examples from Scripture?
18. Why would any of the Israelites have been given Egyptian names? Is this a really significant matter?
19. Review the several names of the tribal princes, noting the variety of meanings. (See Glossary.)
20. Note the relationship of Nahshon and Amminadab to David, in the lineage of the Messiah.
21. How many responsibilities did the tribal princes have, in addition to their help with the census?

## B. THE COUNTING, TRIBE BY TRIBE vv. 17-43

## TEXT

Chapter 1:17. And Moses and Aaron took these men which

are expressed by their names: 18. And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls. 19. As the Lord commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai. 20. And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 21. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Reuben were forty and six thousand and five hundred.

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

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

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

28. Of the children of Issachar, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 29. Those that were

numbered of them, even of the tribe of Issachar, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred.

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

32. Of the children of Joseph, namely, of the children of Ephraim, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 33. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand and five hundred.

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

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

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

40. Of the children of Asher, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; 41. Those that were

numbered of them, even of the tribe of Asher, were forty and one thousand and five hundred.

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

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 1:17. And Moses and Aaron took these men who have been named. 18. They gathered the entire congregation of people in one place, on the first day of the second month. Then they registered themselves by families, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years of age and over, head by head, 19. As the Lord had commanded Moses. So they were counted in the wilderness of Sinai:

20. The children of Reuben, firstborn son of Israel, their generations, according to their families by their fathers' houses, by the number of names, head by head, every male twenty years old and over, all who were able to go to war— 21. the total for the tribe of Reuben was 46,500. [Again, the formula for the text may be applied, tribe by tribe, through v. 43, refer to the KJV already given.]

#### COMMENTARY

Apparently the census is completed in one day, which would require fine preparation in advance. We had been given an approximation of the figure in Exodus 12:37, and an exact number in Exodus 38:26. However, the figures might have been supplied by Moses after the date of reference, in a later composition of the book; or, the first and earlier reference may have been a well-calculated estimate. We are not to suppose that the named princes made their counts alone; this would have been an impossible chore. The totals no doubt resulted when the numbers of individual families were simply added together and combined at graduating levels within the tribes, until a final

sum might be reckoned as the composite of all smaller sub-groups.

The impressive totals listed for each tribe, as well as that for the nation as a whole, have been subjected to harsh critical comments. Butzer, *IB*, simply affirms that "No fertile land, let alone a desert, could have provided sufficient nourishment for such a mobile population, nor indeed could it have journeyed as ch. 33 relates . . . . The artificiality of the numbers here is evidenced by the fact that half the tribes are below, and half above, the fifty-thousand mark." His conclusion had been previously stated: "The result is quite unhistorical." (pp. 145, 146).

In response, we must notice that the text nowhere affirms that the people lived upon the products of the land through which they moved, and in which they were to live for forty years. Apparently he is unwilling to allow the record to speak for itself: that God miraculously provided a great quantity of manna and meat as necessary to the host. Discount this provision, and his argument becomes plausible; but so it is with every critical argument calling God's powers into question. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Israelites did not live on manna alone; doubtless they ate of their sizeable herds and flocks, and gained some sustenance, however limited, from the land.

With reference to the thought that the numbers divide equally above and below the fifty-thousand mark, we may ask why the arbitrary figure is chosen at all. It has absolutely no significance in itself, and sounds more like the contrived argument of one who has already made up his mind than that of one who is attempting objectivity.

Gray had posed the problem of sustenance in the desert (*ICC*, p. 12), based upon a quotation from Robinson that "a body of two millions of men could not subsist there a week without drawing their supplies of water, as well as of provisions, from a great distance." To Robinson's words Gray adds, "By a miracle, no doubt, this multitude might have been sustained;

but it ought to be observed that the miracles actually *recorded* are not on an adequate scale . . . (to care for such needs)," (*Ibid*). The presumptions of such a conclusion are clear: that we are told of every occasion which God provided essential food and water for the people; that we are aware of every source of water then available; and that their actual requirements are now to be compared to the contemporary extravagances with which we are familiar. We are speaking of a slave people who are quite accustomed to subsisting on a bare minimum of necessities. They are now relatively inactive, further reducing the necessary input of food and water.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

22. Why is the tribe of Joseph divided into two: Manasseh and Ephraim?
23. Find a reasonable formula for computing an estimate of the total population of Israel, based upon the known factors here.
24. Arrange the tribes in order of their numerical count, from the largest to the least. Can you establish any relationship between this head count and the area or location each tribe was given in the Promised Land in Joshua 13-19?
25. What value is there in repeating the exact formula for each tribe in the census?
26. Suggest some plans Moses, Aaron and the tribal heads might have used to organize the people for the census.

#### C. TOTAL OF THE MARTIAL CENSUS vv. 44-46

##### TEXT

Chapter 1:44. These are those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers. 45. So were all those that were numbered, of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; 46. Even all they

that were numbered were six hundred and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.

### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 1:44. These are the ones who were counted, whom Moses and Aaron numbered with the assistance of the leaders of Israel, twelve men, each representing his father's house. 45. So the entire number of the children of Israel, according to their father's houses, from twenty years of age and up, every able man who could go forth to war in Israel, 46. the total number was 603,550.

### COMMENTARY

When Gray (*ICC*, p. 13) dismisses the census total as unrealistic he cites the number of firstborn at 22,273 (3:43). From this he concludes that the total firstborn, male and female, would be double this figure, or 44,546; the total number of Israelites he then places between 2,000,000 and 2,500,000, and concludes that the average family must have had 50 children! Again, his preconceived conclusion (that the figures are unreliable) has blinded his reason to some important facts: we have no idea whatever how many firstborn males there might have been who were unfit for war; his words make no provision for the Levites, separately counted; and, as Keil proposes, the number may represent only those firstborn sons who were born after the exodus. Michaelis has proposed that the practice of polygamy was widespread among the Israelites, and only the firstborn of the fathers were counted. Baumgarten suggests that all firstborn male children under six years of age were counted, whereas those above that age were not, since they had already been redeemed by partaking of the passover in Egypt. Kurtz mentions other relevant factors: the remarkable fruitfulness of the Hebrew mothers; the exclusion of firstborn sons of the mother who were not also the firstborn of the father; and, like Michaelis, the possibility of polygamy among the Hebrews. Any and each of these may help explain an otherwise difficult question. (See *PC* xi, xii.)

Three important facts might be pointed out regarding this army: it was made up of Israelites only, and included none of the "mixed multitude" who would offer severe problems later; it was made up of the able-bodied only; and, all able-bodied men were included. There is much to be learned from each of them.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

27. Compute the increase of the Israelites, tribe by tribe, since their ancestors first went to Egypt (See Gen. 46:5-27).
28. Why would this census not include any of the "mixed multitude" among the children of Israel?
29. How could such a multitude find sustenance in a wilderness?
30. Why would the Lord not want the Levites to be included in the army?

### III. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LEVITES (1:47-54)

#### TEXT

Chapter 1:47. But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. 48. For the Lord had spoken unto moses, saying, 49. Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: 50. But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. 51. And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. 52. And the children of Isreal shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. 53. But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of