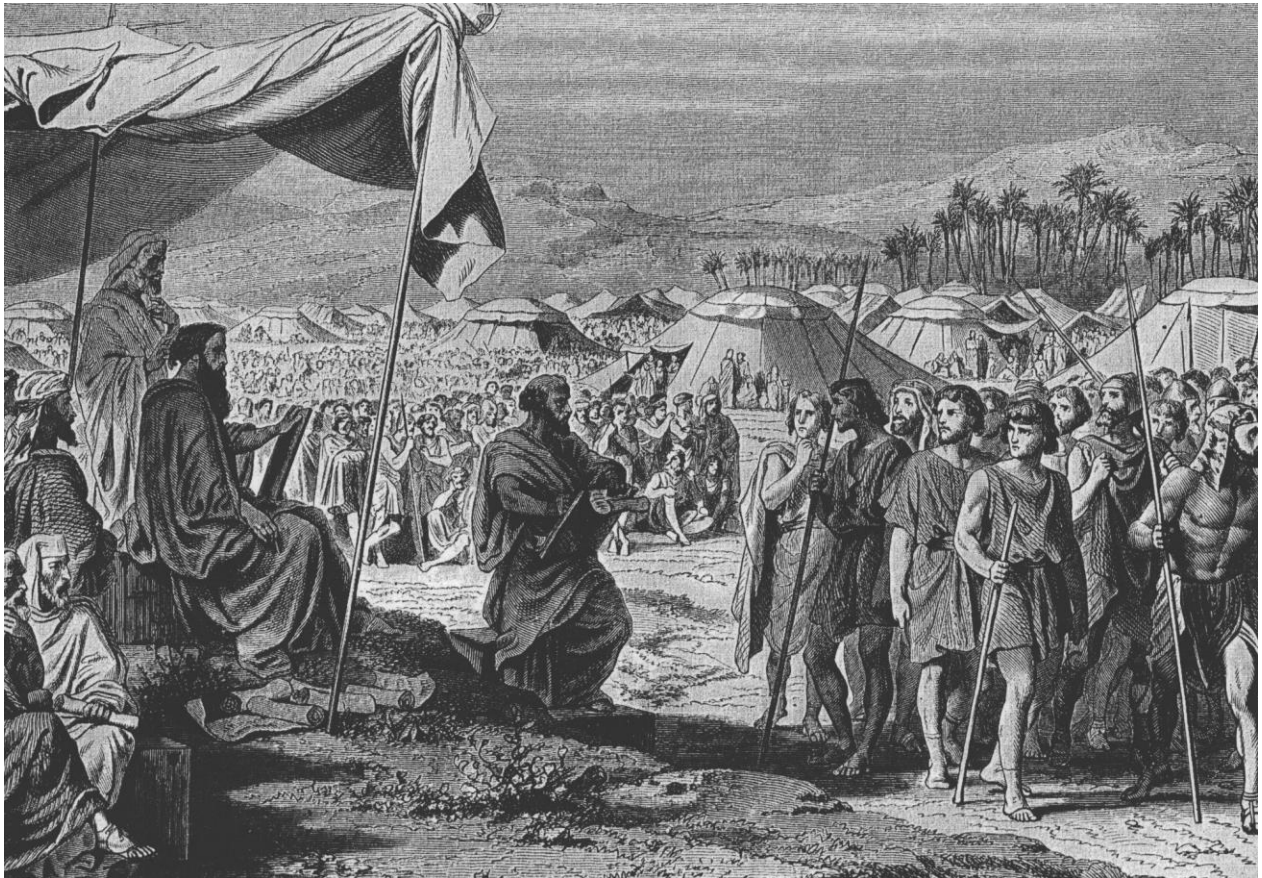




We now commenced the 4th book of the Torah. The importance of the study of these writings of Moses must not be forgotten as Isaiah was moved to warn *to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*. The light we endeavour to reflect is from none other than the Lord Jesus who proclaimed himself to his disciples: e. As we have seen the prophecies of the death and the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus in Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus, so also in the book of Numbers. for example: Paul the Apostle quotes the book of Numbers in the letter to the Corinthians: *that rock was Christ*, and also in Hebrews, referring to the ashes of the heifer teaching the purging of a conscience from dead works through the blood of Christ. We look forward to these and many other examples. Brother Ken has mentioned why it was named the book of numbers. the people were

numbered on some four separate occasions recorded in chapters 1,3,4 and 26.

The first and last numbering took place at either end of the wilderness journey. Lessons can be gleaned from this book, for Israel with a called out, chosen people of God. They were the Ecclesia. But what did God say of this people? what warning is apt for the latter day ecclesia in the wilderness of Sin? Psalm 95:7-11: *For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swore in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.*

The summary of the book of numbers: 40 years long was I agreed with this generation: this application is made also to Israel after the spirit Hebrews 4:1-2: *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

It is evident that many greater and mightier nations existed at that time which overshadowed Israel dwelling in cities and fortified towns. all those many peoples nations and tongues, of little account has been preserved, very few records compared to the careful presentation of the history of these people Israel, a comparatively small nation, migrants dwelling in tents wandering in the wilderness. Why is this? It is because they were the children of the covenant a special treasure, a theocracy. The Lord God was their king, and an institution of laws had been established. In order for the ordered and organised settlement of the promised land, the long promised Kingdom of God, a structure and a good order had to be instituted

and an account taken of the subject of this Kingdom to be. So we can see in this first chapter of the book of numbers orders being given to Moses to number the people (Verses 1-4) People being nominated to assist him in this work (Verses 5-16) and then the particular number of each tribe being given (Verses 17-43) and then the sum total of the nation given (Verses 44-46). In all this, there is one notable exception, where the tribe of Levi was not counted.

What was the purpose of this counting? There may be several reasons, but it was not for the glorification of men. This reason was especially forbidden, as David discovered when we remember the record of how Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel, and he was duly punished because his motives were not in line with the mind of God. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

Here in Numbers 1, the reason was for the organisation of the camp. This was a census to determine the families, the houses and the tribes, and who belong to who. This was important for if they were to shortly enter the land of promise how could the land be inhabited in a controlled and organised way? or how could it be allocated? if there were no structure or recognition of individual families and their needs. Another reason, it meant that there was no hiding place and no one was anonymous. In the incident concerning Achan, he was only identified through a process of elimination, made possible through the awareness of what tribe, family and house he belonged to. A further reason, it gave all authority to the determination of inheritance rights, a fixed official census laid down for the generations following, the family tree as it were. Lastly, this numbering would bring to attention the covenant God had made to the patriarchs of this people in the wilderness. For this accounting proved the accomplishment of the promise made to Abraham that God would multiply his seed exceedingly.. *I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth*. In a matter of a very few generations, those 70 persons who went down into Egypt had now increased to be in

excess of 2 million people. It proved that God had been with them. When we consider but when David carried out his illegal poll 500 years later, the population growth had not even doubled. This shows us how much the population was depleted during the time of the Judges but on the other hand, how God had preserved them whilst in Egypt.

One further thought with regards to reasons for this poll, is that we see how God required great care in the organisation of the counting itself. Moses was instructed to use the heads of the tribes, and everyone, the head of the House of his father's to be involved in the counting of their specific unit. In the same way, Moses led the people; and the heads of the tribes, on the heads of the houses of their fathers let their families. So God who cares for his people gently leaves them as a shepherd leads his flock, as the psalmist prays: (Psalm 80:1) *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth.* To spiritual Israel, Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep who knows all his sheep by name said *but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

As mentioned the latter part of this chapter we can see how the tribe of Levi is excluded from this count. This tribe is set apart and reserved for a particular purpose. 49 -50: *Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: 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.*

This tribe was set apart as a result of their distinguished action at the foot of Mount Sinai. For the cry went up: who is on the Lord's side? the nation have been engaged in idolatry and riotous dancing around the newly constructed golden calf. Exodus 32:26-28: *Then Moses*

*stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.*

For their willing and sanctified hearts, they were rewarded for having a unique position in the nation, as special ministers working on God's behalf for the rest of the nation. It was the Levite's who were to dismantle the Tabernacle and to carry it and all that pertained to it, and then to set it up again in the appointed place. When the camp rested it was the Levite's who were to encamp around about the Tabernacle, to be a guard unto the House of God, to prevent it from being profaned, that there was to be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel. (v53) The Levite's teaching that prevention is the best cure, to teach guide and guard, to lead the nation away from temptation. For this reason they were not to be reckoned amongst Israel they were not be numbered with the men of war. So likewise, those who have chosen to be soldiers after the spirit like the Levite's are not to be reckoned with, or entangled with the affairs of this life as the apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 2: 4 *No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

Brother Terry