

NUMBERS 3:14-39 (A SIGN IN THE WILDERNESS)

There are a whole heap of verses today, but they will go quickly. It's the poem at the end that may take us a while to get through. But even that won't take too long, believe me... my words are true.

I know the verses from the past two chapters, and so far in this one, are not easy to sit and read. How much more then do we make them interesting enough to be the focal point of our Sunday morning. Right? Well, you've stuck it out this far, and the verses here are not nearly as repetitive as what is coming in Chapter 7. So don't feel too overwhelmed by them. And now that I think of it, maybe I should never have mentioned what is coming in that chapter! I can see it now – an empty church on that Sunday as everyone finds something else to do other than listen to that.

Don't worry, that too will go quickly. One bite at a time, and the meal gets finished. One shovel at a time, and the hole gets dug (or filled in), and one step at a time, and you're on top of the mountain. What we need to do is look for the joy we can have in the process. If we're eating, we can slowly enjoy each flavor we taste. If we're digging a hole, we can think about the pretty plant (or whatever the hole is used for) that we will be putting in it. If we are climbing a mountain, we can stop and find 10,000 little flowers, each one unique as it pokes its head out of some seemingly impossible-to-support-life crag or crevice.

The joy is not just being at the end of things, but it can be found in the doing of things. That's why God gave us tasks like going through long details about the numbering of people in a congregation that He had led out of bondage. Eventually, they would be counted, arranged, and then set out for their journey to the land of promise. While traveling, they would become the object of attention to those who noticed their coming...

Text Verse: “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!
Your dwellings, O Israel!
⁶ Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens by the riverside,
Like aloes planted by the Lord,
Like cedars beside the waters.” Numbers 24:5, 6

The Lord recorded Balaam’s reaction to the beauty of the layout of Israel’s encampment in the wilderness. He made an oracle about it, and the Lord put that oracle in His word for us to read and see how much the prophet appreciated what He saw. It is similar to another description of a war encampment in our history. That is found in the Battle Hymn of the Republic written by Julia Ward Howe –

*I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on.*

Her words are truly beautiful concerning the layout of men prepared for battle, and maybe we should look at what God has put in His word in that way. If we can simply appreciate what He has recorded as a sign of life in the wilderness concerning the whole host of Israel, maybe we can then appreciate a mental picture of them in the way that Balaam did. Let’s try that as we go on. It’s all to be found in His superior word. And so let’s turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Census of the Levites (verses 14-39)

¹⁴ Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying:

The words of this verse still fall under the main category presented in verse 3:1 concerning the *toledot*, or generations, of Aaron and Moses, meaning the tribe of Levi as is presented by and through them. After stating that this was the intent of the passage, the names of Aaron's sons were given, including two that had already died.

Next, Moses was told to have Levi brought near in order to serve the Lord concerning everything connected to the tent of meeting. They were to be set apart, given entirely to Aaron in place of the firstborn of the children of Israel. The Lord had claimed the firstborn at the Exodus, but now He has exchanged them for the Levites. With this understanding, the words of this verse are given. What the Lord speaks to Moses will be in accord with that thought.

¹⁵ “Number the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families;

The Levites are now to be numbered. Previously, the Lord said to Moses that they were not to be numbered “among their fathers’ tribe,” meaning along with the other tribes. That was seen in Numbers 1:47-49 –

“But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers’ tribe; ⁴⁸ for the Lord had spoken to Moses, saying: ⁴⁹ “Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel;”

This didn't mean they weren't to be numbered at all, but that the numbering now being conducted is separate from the other tribes, and for an entirely different purpose and principle – that of service to the Lord.

Thus, their counting is to be done in a completely different manner than that of the other tribes, as is seen in the words...

¹⁵ (con't) **you shall number every male from a month old and above."**

Every male of the Levites is reckoned as the Lord's possession. Their counting was to begin when they were one month of age, and it was inclusive of all males after that. This is completely different than the counting of the other tribes. In Numbers 1:2, 3, it said –

"Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, ³from twenty years old and above—all who *are able to go to war* in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies."

The other tribes were counted from twenty years old and above because they were to be reckoned as men of war. The Levites were to be taken in place of the firstborn of the other tribes, but there would be firstborn of all ages, and so as their substitutes before the Lord, all ages of Levites are counted, regardless of their ability to serve. In Chapter 4, they were counted from thirty and above for service. In Chapter 8, they will be seen to enter into service at twenty-five, and they are to retire from service at the age of fifty.

¹⁶ **So Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord, as he was commanded.**

The words here actually precede the counting of them in the record, but they are given now to show that what follows was in accord with the word of the Lord. Thus the counting which follows is already accomplished at the writing of the words of this verse. The term "according to the word of the Lord" is *al pi Yehovah*, or literally "according to the mouth of Yehovah." It is

common terminology, but the explanation for it is useful from time to time. The word *peh*, or mouth eventually finds its source in a root which means “to puff.” Thus, Moses has performed his duties according to the word breathed out to him by Yehovah. The Lord commanded, and Moses in turn performed.

¹⁷ These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The father’s houses and then their families, as cited in verse 15, are now beginning to be named. What follows is to be a breakdown for the census according to the listing given in Exodus 6 –

“These *are* the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi *were* one hundred and thirty-seven. ¹⁷ The sons of Gershon *were* Libni and Shimi according to their families. ¹⁸ And the sons of Kohath *were* Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath *were* one hundred and thirty-three. ¹⁹ The sons of Merari *were* Mahli and Mushi. These *are* the families of Levi according to their generations.” Exodus 6:16-19

The houses of Levi are according to the sons of Levi – Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Levi means “Attached.” Gershon means “Exiled One.” Kohath means either “Obedience” or “Congregation.” It comes from a root signifying to ally oneself. Merari means “Bitter” or “My Bitterness.”

¹⁸ And these *are* the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei.

The houses are broken down into families. The families of the house of Gershon are Libni and Shimei. Libni means “White.” Shimei means “Renown” or “Famous.”

¹⁹ And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

Next are the families of Kohath. Amram means “A People Exalted.” Izhar has a few possible meanings that signify something related to “Zenith,” “Shining,” “Anointed,” etc. Hebron means “Confederation” or “Alliance.” Uzziel means “God is My Strength” or “Strength of God.”

²⁰ And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi.

Mahli means “Infirmity” or “Weak.” Mushi may mean “Drawn out” or “Proved of the Lord.” These are debatable.

²⁰ (con’t) These *are* the families of the Levites by their fathers’ houses.

Again, the record is being specific. There is the house of the fathers, meaning the three sons of Levi, and then there are families within those houses according to the sons within the house. In all, there are eight families recorded from their fathers’ houses. This will then be re-explained, once again, in a new way as follows...

²¹ From Gershon *came* the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimites;

Gershon is a son of Levi, thus a house within the tribe. The names of his sons are then considered families within the house. Thus, these names – the Libnites and the Shimites – correspond to Libni and Shimei. Although this may be obvious, the records are detailed, just as birth and genealogical records are today. What we read here may have little value to us because it would be like reading the genealogy of the Shimabuku family in Japan or the Garrett family in England, but to the family who bears the name, it holds

great meaning. In maintaining these records, the Levites would always be aware of their position and responsibilities within the tribe.

²¹ (con't) **these were the families of the Gershonites.**

The record of the Gershonite families, the oldest son of Levi, is complete. From that, a tally of their number can then be made...

²² **Those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above—of those who were numbered *there were* seven thousand five hundred.**

Again, remember that this is a total counting of all males from a month old and upward, not merely of adult males ready for war. The number of the two families within Gershon is set at 7500. Thus, they are less than the total of Kohath, and more than the total of Merari. Their positioning within the camp is next to be given...

²³ **The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward.**

The name Gershon, or “Exiled One,” is suited to their location. They are furthest *yammah*, or west. *Yammah* signifies “sea” and thus the direction is given in relation to the land of Israel where the great sea, the Mediterranean, is to the west. Being in the west, the Gershonites are furthest from the entrance to the sanctuary.

Whether this is simply happenstance or not, it is fitting to the name “Exiled One” nonetheless. Their position then placed them between the sanctuary and the tribes with the smallest number of forces, those of Ephraim,

Manasseh, and Benjamin. When combined, in total numbers they will still be the smallest group of people in size.

²⁴ And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael.

Eliasaph means "God has added." Lael means "By God" or "Belonging to God." He is named as the leader of the entire house of Gershon, and thus was over the families within the clan. Surprisingly, his family – be it Libni or Shimei – is not indicated.

²⁵ The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting *included* the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting,

Gershon does the tent work, much of which is described in Exodus 26. This would actually be several layers of tent which were draped over the tabernacle, and which consisted of various materials. They would handle all of this along with the screen for the opening into the tent of meeting. To see what all of these things detail, go back and watch the Exodus sermons. Magnificent pictures of Christ are seen in every detail.

²⁶ the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which *are* around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them.

Much of the detail of these things is found in Exodus 27. Merari is given charge of all of these things. The materials, when fully packed up for transport, would be a very heavy load, despite being mostly fabrics. There was a great amount in total. Again, every single detail was reviewed and explained in how each points to the Person and work of Christ. Be sure to brush up on those sermons.

²⁷ From Kohath *came* the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites;

Kohath is a son of Levi, thus a house within the tribe. The names of his sons are then considered families within the house. Thus, these names – the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites – correspond to Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The four sons of Kohath are equal in number to both of the other two sons of Levi. Moses and Aaron and his sons are from Amram. They are reckoned as such, but they are not considered in the placement of Amram when they encamp. That will be seen in a few verses.

²⁷ (con't) *these were* the families of the Kohathites.

The record of the Kohathite families, the middle son of Levi, is complete. From that, a tally of their number can then be made...

²⁸ According to the number of all the males, from a month old and above, *there were* eight thousand six hundred keeping charge of the sanctuary.

The total counting of all males from a month old and upward, in the four families within Kohath is set at 8600. Thus, they are the largest clan within the tribe of Levi. They are noted here as keeping charge of *ha'qodesh*, or "the holy." This is the first time the term is used in the book of Numbers. It is stated to indicate the holy things within the sanctuary which the members of this tribe will be responsible for. Their positioning within the camp is next given...

²⁹ The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle.

These families are to be on the south, meaning the right, side. The right is not considered from the perspective of those entering the sanctuary, but from the position of the ark within the tabernacle. Thus, the south is the right side. It is the honorable side. Despite being the largest family of Levites, the position of Kohath places them between the sanctuary and the tribes with the second smallest number of forces, those of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. Doesn't that seem like an odd grouping then?

³⁰ And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.

Elizaphan means "God Hides" or "God has Protected." He is named as the leader of the entire house of Kohath, and thus was over the families within the clan. Everything about this house has an air of distinction. The meaning of the name of Kohath, and those of his sons as well, all fit well with the placement on this right, honorable side.

³¹ Their duty *included* the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them.

These are the precious and holy objects within the tabernacle itself. These were to be carried by men, not placed on carts. Thus, even if there was more labor involved in the taking down and putting up of the other objects, there was more labor in the transportation of these. The responsibility of this tribe is of the highest measure.

³² And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *was to be* chief over the leaders of the Levites, *with oversight* of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

Here the words *u-nsi nesii* or “and leader leader,” is applied to Eleazar the son of Aaron. Thus, he is designated at the chief leader. In 2 Kings 25:18, the same position is called the “second priest.” He is the eldest surviving son of Aaron, and he would perform the work of Aaron if Aaron was sick or otherwise unable to perform his duties.

He is thus in the superior position above all other priests or Levites. He is the son of Aaron. Aaron, though high priest, is a son of Amram who is a son of Kohath. This is the reason for mentioning this position now, while dealing with the tribe of Kohath. A new word, *pequddah*, a noun indicating custody or care, is introduced here to describe this status. Thus, he is the superior authority of all of the servants of *ha’qodesh*, or the holy things of the Lord.

³³ From Merari *came* the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites;

Merari is a son of Levi, thus a house within the tribe. The names of his sons are considered families within the house. These names – the Mahlites and the Mushites – correspond to Mahli and Mushi.

³³ (con’t) *these were* the families of Merari.

The record of the families of Merari, the youngest son of Levi, is complete. From that, a tally of their number can then be made...

³⁴ And those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above, *were* six thousand two hundred.

The total counting of all males from a month old and upward, in the two families within Merari is set at 6200. Thus, they are the smallest clan within the tribe of Levi. For the previous two tribes, Gershon and Kohath, the order of given information was 1) recorded number, 2) placement in relation to the tabernacle, and then 3) the name of the leader. That pattern is now deviated from. Instead of first giving the placement, the leader's name is given...

³⁵ The leader of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail.

The name Zuriel means something like My Rock is God, or Rock of God. The name Abihail, as you perfectly remember from the Book of Esther, is "Father of Might." Zuriel is named as the leader of the entire house of Gershon, and thus was over the families within the clan. His family – be it Mahli or Mushi – is not named. Their positioning within the camp is next to be given...

^{35 (con't)} These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle.

These families are to be on the north, meaning the left, side. Again, the direction is not considered from the perspective of entering the sanctuary, but from the position of the ark within the tabernacle. Thus, the north is the left side. It is the weaker, less noble side. The meaning of the names of Merari and his sons leans heavily towards the placement of them on the north. For example, Mahli means "Infirmity" or "Weak." It is fitting then to the left side placement.

Despite being the smallest family of Levites, the position of Merari places them between the sanctuary and the tribes with the second largest number of forces, those of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. Doesn't that again seem like an odd grouping?

³⁶ And the appointed duty of the children of Merari *included* the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them,

We waited until this chapter to see the first use of *pequddah*, or oversight. And then, in just four verses, we are given its second use. The tribe of Merari is given oversight of this list of objects which are the basis of the tabernacle itself. These heaviest and most burdensome objects are given to the smallest, and last born family within the tribe. Go ahead, let the last in the family really have it. With two older brothers, I – like Merari – am used to it. But their heavy labors are not yet done. The immense weight of the objects just named will have more added onto their load...

³⁷ and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.

These are described in Exodus 27. It is a lot of solid brass sockets, with accompanying pillars. That's OK, the young guys can handle it. Now with the three houses of Levi properly placed, the Lord has one more placement to make...

³⁸ Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east,

It has already been seen that the standard of Judah would be *qedemah* or on the east of the sanctuary. Along with them would be Issachar and Zebulun. They are by far the largest number in regards to total people camped on any side of the sanctuary. However, there will be a small contingent between them and the tabernacle itself...

³⁸ (con't) before the tabernacle of meeting,

liphne ohel moed mizrakha – before the tent of meeting, eastward. It is almost tragic when translators will translate two different words, with two different meanings, in one sentence with the same word in English. The first clause mentioned the *mishkan*, or tabernacle. This clause now mentions *ohel moed*, the tent of meeting. There is a reason for this precision, and it is rather sloppy to ignore it. The tabernacle is inside of the tent of meeting. Although one is enclosed in another, they are different things.

And even more, the previous clause said *qedemah*, or “toward the east.” This clause says *mizrakha*, or “eastward.” The NKJV didn’t even bother to translate the word. But it is there for a reason. The entire layout is pointing eastward, toward the sunrise, as the word *mizrakha* implies. The beauty of the symbolism being portrayed is completely lost without properly tending to the Hebrew. Understanding this, we see that between tribes under the standard of Judah, and before the tent of meeting, there at its entrance...

³⁸ (con’t) **were Moses, Aaron, and his sons,**

The lawgiver, and the high priest and his sons – meaning the priesthood in total – is located at this particular spot. It is a splendid picture of access to God being only through His word and His High Priest. In other words, as they picture Christ, one can only come to God through Christ – the Word of God, and God’s High Priest. As a side note: Liberal theologians are gross. Cambridge says of this clause, “The mention of his name in a command given to him is strange. It would be still stranger if he were the writer of the passage.” They imply that it wasn’t the Lord who said for Moses to be so positioned in relation to the sanctuary, and they say it is even less likely that Moses is the author. Personally, I don’t envy them in whatever they have coming.

³⁸ (con’t) **keeping charge of the sanctuary,**

This is the first time that the *miqdash*, or sanctuary is mentioned in Numbers. This is speaking of the entire compound including the court and everything within it. Moses, and Aaron and his sons, were there to keep charge of the entire sanctuary. The responsibility ultimately rested upon them and their constant watch of it.

38 (con't) to meet the needs of the children of Israel;

The same word just used and translated as “charge” in the previous clause is used again in this clause. It says, “for the charge of the sons of Israel.” The question is whether this means “instead of the children of Israel, or “for the safety of the children of Israel.” The latter appears to be the case because...

38 (con't) but the outsider who came near was to be put to death.

The word “outsider” means anyone not authorized. The only time someone could approach the sanctuary was as outlined in the book of Leviticus when one came to make an offering or sacrifice, etc. If anyone dared to approach that was not authorized, there was only one penalty... death.

39 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the Lord, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were twenty-two thousand.

If you are astute, you noticed that in verse 16, only Moses was mentioned as having numbered them. However, here Aaron is included as having participated. The Hebrew text has a point over the word *v'aharon*, or “and Aaron.” Some attempt to say that it is a spurious insertion that is noted by the point. It is more likely that it is showing that verse 39 is simply acknowledging what verse 16 had instructed, and that Moses did according to the word of the Lord with Aaron assisting in the numbering. It doesn't

change anything in regards to the obedience of Moses in fulfilling the command of the Lord.

If you are double astute, then you have noticed that the numbers do not match up. Adding 7500+8600+6200, you will arrive at 22300. There is a difference of 300 in the total. It is a problem that is not left without possible solutions. The first is that the 8600 should read 8300. The words *ses* and *shalosh* being one letter different. However, that would demonstrate complete incompetence because of such an obvious error.

What will make this more difficult to reconcile is that the total number of firstborn of the other tribes will have an impossible number of firstborn in relation to the number of people counted. No sufficient explanation has been given for either number. But what I would suggest is that the reason for the differences is because the number of firstborn is speaking of native Israelites and not those who later joined, known as the mixed-multitude who came out of Egypt and who later were inculcated into the ranks of the various tribes. In this, the 300-person disparity omits the firstborn of the native-born Levites who cannot be counted against the whole because the firstborn already belong to the Lord.

This would be in complete accord with the law of the stranger joining the congregation of Israel as is described in Exodus 12, and it would follow with what will occur in the future in Israel, as is recorded in Ezekiel 47 –

“It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.” Ezekiel 47:22

Only the firstborn of Israel is counted, despite the total counting of all who had joined Israel. This would also explain the large numbers which are recorded after a sojourn in Egypt of 215 years.

*The people of God, brought together as one
When they come to Him in faith as He requires
It is through faith alone; faith in His Son
That we are granted eternal life; life that never expires*

*From Jew and from Gentile, all are welcome
From rich and from poor, none are excluded
By faith in Christ, He accepts all, not just some
Yes, through faith in Christ, all who come are included*

*Thank You, O God that we have access again
People from every tribe and every tongue are to You reconciled
Whether young or old, whether women or men
Because of Christ Jesus, You have again on us smiled*

II. A Sign in the Wilderness

We have now gone through three long, very involved, and if you don't like numbers and minutiae, very tiring chapters. However, I have constantly informed you that everything points to Christ in this wonderful book. Sometimes, it just takes more time to make the picture than at other times. This one took us almost three full chapters, with a few interspersed pictures coming out in the process.

While reading Numbers, many years ago, I got to Chapter 3 and said, "Well isn't that curious." I mentioned what I thought was curious as we went along. The Lord commanded that a larger number of Levites would be placed with a smaller number in their corresponding three tribes on the

south side, and that a smaller number of Levites would be placed with a larger number in their corresponding three tribes on the north side.

As soon as I made that connection, it became clear what was happening, and why He would do this. It must be remembered that at very few times, maybe even only one or two in the entire forty years they were in the wilderness, they would actually be able to encamp as directed by the Lord. There simply wasn't enough space to do so in most places of Sinai that they traveled. But when they could be properly laid out as He directed, it would become a sign of His love for the people of the world. I decided to graph out the tribes according to their numbers, and by the time I started putting them on a graph, I already had a picture in my mind of what was coming. It came out exactly as I supposed it would. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 –

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ²all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.”

Paul shows that as the Israelites traveled through the desert they actually interacted with things that were living pictures of life in Christ. He didn't just do this with things though, He did it with them as a people as well. The mandated census of the twelve tribes, and of Levi, the arrangement of the tribes and then the Levites, the directions they were to face, etc., were all specified by Him. Nothing was left up to the people.

As presented, the layout of the tribes was Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun east of the tabernacle at 186,400 men (as well as families). On the south, there was Reuben, Simeon, and Gad encamped with 151,450 men (along with families). On the west were Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin with 108,100 men (along with families). On the north are the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali with 157,600 men (and, of course, their families.)

Then came the Levites. The Gershonites equaled 7500 and were to camp on the west. The Kohathites numbered 8600 and camped on the south. And the Merarites equaled 6200 and camped on the north. The last to be positioned were Moses, Aaron, and his sons who camped east, toward the sunrise.

East 186,400 plus Moses, Aaron, and his sons

West 108,100 plus 7500 = 115,600

North 157,600 plus 6200 = 163,800

South 151,450 plus 8600 = 160,050

By putting the larger numbers of Levites to the south and the smaller to the north things pretty much even out. In fact, it stands at 97.71 percent equal. Now, think about the layout in real human terms... not like a study Bible shows you. A study Bible will draw a little box indicating a tabernacle and then a bunch of names tossed around it in the order the names are listed, or they will make neat little boxes representing each tribe and put their names in them, all in little rows so that you can easily see the layout.

Such depictions are incorrect. Imagine a big demonstration at the Washington Mall – say, 200,000-500,000 people. You are talking about acres and acres and acres of people. Now imagine 603,550 men, plus 22,000 Levites and then toss in their families – say 2-3 million people, along with tents, sheep, donkeys, wagons, etc. This would take up square miles of land.

All the tribes designated east of the tabernacle would have to be east of it. All those designated south would have to be south, etc. Now put the numbers to life and what would you actually see from an airplane? Or better yet, what would Baalam who spoke out our text verse today see? He would see a massive cross.

The numbers, when properly graphed, show a cross. With the north and south sides almost imperceptibly different in size, the east side considerably

longer, and the west considerably shorter, exactly as a cross is depicted for the hanging of human who is suspended off the ground with his arms outspread. The Israelites, under ideal conditions as they traveled for 40 years, were a picture of life in Christ, forming a miles-square cross in the desert. One thing to consider is that the tabernacle would have been at the center of the cross and the Ark of the Covenant would be where Christ's heart would have been on the cross of Calvary.

It may have taken a bit of time and a large number of verses to get to where we have arrived, but once again God is showing us what was coming in the giving of His Son. The entire Old Testament points to Christ. It is, in fact, all about Him. In understanding this marvelous picture as it has been presented, we can go back and see the significance of why the tribe of Judah, or Praise, is the lead tribe, and the first to set out.

They were to the east of the tabernacle and would be the base of the cross. The picture: Let praise of the Lord go first, and let it be the foundation of our love and devotion to God in Christ. Also, the name of Yehovah, the Lord, is spelled yod-he-vav-he. Judah, however, is spelled yod-he-vav-dalet-he. A *dalet* is added to the Divine name. The letter *dalet* signifies a door. Jesus came from Judah, and He is the Door as stated in John 10:7. Thus, Jesus is the Door to restored access to the Lord, Yehovah. To approach the tabernacle, where the Lord is, one must come through Judah at the east. But, it is where the blood of Christ would have flowed to on a cross. One must come through the shed blood of Christ, the Door.

As far as the cross, the top of it would be the three tribes which descend from Rachel – Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. If you remember from the Genesis sermons, the two wives of Jacob, Leah and Rachel formed their own pictures – the Law and Grace, Rachel being Grace. The symbolism is marvelous, one must come through the fulfilled law which is the shed blood of Christ, but it is Grace which then adorns the top of the cross. It is the pinnacle of what God has done in Christ and what adorns His work.

God chose the names of these tribes and people to be arranged in such a way that they would provide us with snapshots of what He had planned in Christ's coming, and in what that means to us. You've seen just a few of them today to show you that all of the detail has been given as a picture of God's love for the people of the world as displayed in the giving of His Son. Let us reflect on such things, and endeavor to put Christ first in our lives. God has put Him on prominent display in His word. So should we as we live in His presence. As we opened with Julia Ward Howe's words, let's consider one more refrain from her poem in light of what we have learned today –

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.*

Closing Verse: "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Galatians 6:14

Next Week: Numbers 3:40-51 *In being redeemed, everything is sunny...* (The Redemption Money) (6th Numbers Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. It may seem at times as if you are lost in a desert, wandering aimlessly. But the Lord is there, carefully leading you to the Land of Promise. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

A Sign in the Wilderness

Then the Lord spoke to Moses; so He was relaying

In the Wilderness of Sinai, saying:

“Number the children of Levi

By their fathers’ houses; so you shall do

By their families; you shall number every male

From a month old and above, as I am instructing you

So Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord

As he was commanded, no detail was ignored

These were the sons of Levi by their names, so we see

Gershon, Kohath, and Merari; yes these three

And these are the names of the sons of Gershon

By their families: Libni and Shimei, so they are known

And the sons of Kohath by their families, as the record does tell

Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel

And the sons of Merari by their families, two we see

Mahli and Mushi

These are the families of the Levites

-----just the men, not including their spouses

By their fathers’ houses

From Gershon came the family of the Libnites

And the family of the Shimites, as well

These were the families of the Gershonites
As the records do tell
Those who were numbered
According to the number of all the males
-----from a month old and above, great and small
Of those who were numbered
There were seven thousand five hundred in all

The families of the Gershonites
Were to camp behind the tabernacle westward, as the Lord did tell
And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonites
Was Eliasaph the son of Lael
The duties of the children of Gershon
In the tabernacle of meeting, as the Lord did say
Included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering
The screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting
-----and yet more was coming their way...

The screen for the door of the court
The hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle
And the altar, and their cords
According to all the work relating to them; so they were to tackle
From Kohath came the family of the Amramites
The family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites too
And the family of the Uzzielites
These were the families of the Kohathites, through and through

According to the number of all the males
From a month old and above, as we see
There were eight thousand six hundred
Keeping charge of the sanctuary
The families of the children of Kohath, the Lord did decide
Were to camp on the tabernacles' south side

And the leader of the fathers' house of the families
-----so the record does tell
Of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel
Their duty included the ark, the table
The lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary
With which they ministered
The screen, and all the work relating to them, as we now see

And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest
Was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites
With oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary
Watching every detail, not just the highlights
From Merari came the family of the Mahlites
And the family of the Mushites also
These were the families of Merari
As we now know

And those who were numbered
According to the number of all the males, as the record said

From a month old and above
Were six thousand two hundred

The leader of the fathers' house of the families
Of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail
These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle
As to them the Lord did tell
And the appointed duty of the children of Merari
Included the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars
-----its sockets, its utensils, according to these words
All the work relating to them
And the pillars of the court all around
-----with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords

Moreover, those who were to camp before the tabernacle
On the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, so we see
Were Moses, Aaron, and his sons
Keeping charge of the sanctuary
To meet the needs of the children of Israel
But the outsider who came near was to be put to death
-----as the Lord did tell

All who were numbered of the Levites
Whom Moses and Aaron numbered
-----at the commandment of the Lord
By their families, all the males from a month old and above

Were twenty-two thousand; so the tally does record
Lord God, we are even now in a wilderness
And we are wanting to be led by You
Without You to direct, our lives would be a mess
And so be our guide, O God; You who are faithful and true
We long for the water in this barren land
May it flow forth from the Rock, our souls to satisfy
Give us this refreshing, spiritual hand
And may we take it, and to our lives daily it apply

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to you for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...