

Tonight we begin a series through the book of Numbers.

The Hebrew title of the book is “In the Wilderness.”

It is the story of how Israel traveled from Sinai to the plains of Moab.

We usually think of Numbers as being primarily about rebellion –  
and certainly there are many rebellions in this book! –  
but when you look at the book as a whole,  
you start to see other themes come out more prominently.

Numbers consists of three blocks of teaching, focusing on the events and teaching at three places:

- 1) Sinai (chapters 1-10)
- 2) Forty Years at Kadesh (chapters 13-19)
- 3) The Plains of Moab (chapters 22-36)

In between these three blocks of teaching,

there are the travel narratives (from Sinai to Kadesh in chapters 11-12,  
and from Kadesh to Moab in chapters 20-21).

The first block of teaching at Sinai is designed to prepare Israel for their wilderness journey.

The second block of teaching at Kadesh is all about Israel’s refusal to enter the land,  
and the development of the priestly duties of the Levites and the sons of Aaron.

The third block of teaching at the Plains of Moab is all about the new generation,  
and preparations for life in the Promised Land.

In other words, Numbers is all about *new beginnings*.

**Introduction: “The LORD Spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai...” (1:1)**

*I The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying,*

Verse 1 contains a lot of important information!

First, *The LORD spoke to Moses*.

This is central to the whole point of the book.

The LORD spoke to Moses.

Moses is the great prophet of the OT –  
because only to Moses did God speak face-to-face.

Who wrote the book of Numbers?

Scholars have their theories – but only the Word of God is infallible!

What does the Word of God say?

In chapter 34 we are told that Moses wrote down the stages of Israel’s travel.  
Therefore, we know that Moses wrote at least *part* of Numbers.

A lot of the detail of the book of Numbers fits with a Mosaic time period –  
reflecting the Egyptian background of Moses and all the Israelites.  
We need to be careful not to say *more* than God says,  
but it is safe to say that the book of Numbers is *essentially* Mosaic.  
We don't know whether he was the one who *wrote* every word –  
but the details and the content of the book plainly came from him.

As Numbers 36:13 declares,  
“These are the commandments and the rules  
that the LORD commanded through Moses to the people of Israel  
in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.”  
The place where the church needs to take a stand is here.  
These commandments and rules were commanded by God *through Moses*  
in the plains of Moab.

Whether Moses was the one that did the writing is immaterial.  
But the Word of God says that Moses *was* the one *through whom* these laws came.  
So the first point of verse 1 is that the LORD spoke to Moses.

Secondly, the LORD spoke to Moses *in the wilderness of Sinai – in the tent of meeting*.  
“In the wilderness” is the title of the book in Hebrew –  
and probably would be a better title than “Numbers”!  
We are still at Mt. Sinai – the place where God gave Israel the Ten Commandments  
in the book of Exodus.  
God had met Moses at this mountain – and told him to bring Israel here.  
God had said to Pharaoh through Moses –  
“Israel is my son, my firstborn. Let my son go that he may serve me.” (Ex 4:22-23)  
Now, Israel, God's firstborn, has come to the mountain to serve God.

And, now, Israel had built the tabernacle.  
Portable shrines were common in Egypt and the Middle East –  
they were often taken by armies into battle  
(where you could not build a permanent temple).  
In Exodus, God commands Israel to build a tabernacle –  
so that the glory of the LORD can go with Israel through the wilderness  
and lead them to the Promised Land.

As we saw a few weeks ago, from Psalm 68, Sinai filled the sanctuary –  
when the glory of the LORD left Sinai and filled the Holy of Holies.  
The tent of meeting was the place where God would speak with Moses –  
the place where Aaron and his sons would offer the sacrifices –  
in short, it was the place where earth and heaven meet.

And thirdly, we hear about the timing of *when* God spoke:

On the first day of the second month of the second year...  
Let's get a little perspective.

Israel left Egypt on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month (the day after the first Passover).  
Then, after three months, they arrived at Mt. Sinai.  
Moses spent 40 days on the mountain and received the Law.  
Then, after Israel rebelled and worshiped the golden calf,  
Moses spent *another* 40 days on the mountain (Ex 34:28).  
So that's around six months.  
Israel spends the next six months building the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month (Ex 40:1).  
There are seven days taken up in the consecration of Aaron and his sons,  
and on the eighth day, Aaron and his sons enter their priestly service (Lev 9).  
In chapter 9 of Numbers, we'll hear that the Passover was celebrated  
on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month,  
and we'll hear that those who were unclean in the 1<sup>st</sup> month  
were allowed to partake on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month.  
Meanwhile, as we hear in chapter 1, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month, they take the census.

And then, finally, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year  
the glory cloud will arise from the tabernacle and lead them into the wilderness. (10:11)

## **1. Preparing for Battle: The Census at Sinai (1:2-54)**

### **a. The Census of the Warriors (v2-46)**

<sup>2</sup> "Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head. <sup>3</sup> From twenty years old and upward, all in Israel who are able to go to war, you and Aaron shall list them, company by company. <sup>4</sup> And there shall be with you a man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers. <sup>5</sup> And these are the names of the men who shall assist you. From Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur; <sup>6</sup> from Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai; <sup>7</sup> from Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab; <sup>8</sup> from Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar; <sup>9</sup> from Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon; <sup>10</sup> from the sons of Joseph, from Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud, and from Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur; <sup>11</sup> from Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni; <sup>12</sup> from Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai; <sup>13</sup> from Asher, Pagiél the son of Ochran; <sup>14</sup> from Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel; <sup>15</sup> from Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan." <sup>16</sup> These were the ones chosen from the congregation, the chiefs of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the clans of Israel.

In verses 5-16, we hear the names of the tribal leaders of Israel –  
one man from each tribe who assists Moses with the census.  
We don't know much about these men,  
except Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, from the tribe of Judah.

In the book of Ruth, Nahshon the son of Amminadab is said to be the grandfather of Boaz.

There are probably a few generations missing here –

since there are 200-400 years in between Nahshon and Boaz!

But Nahshon's son, Salmon, was the one who married Rahab according to Matt 1:5.

And these 12 men help Moses and Aaron conduct the census (or, perhaps, they simply report the numbers that they collected just six months earlier).

*<sup>17</sup> Moses and Aaron took these men who had been named, <sup>18</sup> and on the first day of the second month, they assembled the whole congregation together, who registered themselves by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names from twenty years old and upward, head by head, <sup>19</sup> as the LORD commanded Moses. So he listed them in the wilderness of Sinai.*

*<sup>20</sup> The people of Reuben, Israel's firstborn, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, head by head, every male from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go to war: <sup>21</sup> those listed of the tribe of Reuben were 46,500.*

*<sup>22</sup> Of the people of Simeon, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, those of them who were listed, according to the number of names, head by head, every male from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go to war: <sup>23</sup> those listed of the tribe of Simeon were 59,300.*

*<sup>24</sup> Of the people of Gad, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go to war:*

*<sup>25</sup> those listed of the tribe of Gad were 45,650.*

*<sup>26</sup> Of the people of Judah, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>27</sup> those listed of the tribe of Judah were 74,600.*

*<sup>28</sup> Of the people of Issachar, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>29</sup> those listed of the tribe of Issachar were 54,400.*

*<sup>30</sup> Of the people of Zebulun, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>31</sup> those listed of the tribe of Zebulun were 57,400.*

*<sup>32</sup> Of the people of Joseph, namely, of the people of Ephraim, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>33</sup> those listed of the tribe of Ephraim were 40,500.*

*<sup>34</sup> Of the people of Manasseh, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>35</sup> those listed of the tribe of Manasseh were 32,200.*

*<sup>36</sup> Of the people of Benjamin, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>37</sup> those listed of the tribe of Benjamin were 35,400.*

*<sup>38</sup> Of the people of Dan, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>39</sup> those listed of the tribe of Dan were 62,700.*

<sup>40</sup> *Of the people of Asher, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>41</sup> those listed of the tribe of Asher were 41,500.*

<sup>42</sup> *Of the people of Naphtali, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war: <sup>43</sup> those listed of the tribe of Naphtali were 53,400.*

<sup>44</sup> *These are those who were listed, whom Moses and Aaron listed with the help of the chiefs of Israel, twelve men, each representing his fathers' house. <sup>45</sup> So all those listed of the people of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go to war in Israel— <sup>46</sup> all those listed were 603,550.*

Exodus 30 explains that a census tax was to be collected when Israel numbered themselves, and Exodus 38 says that the 603,550 men of the first census paid 100 talents of silver and 1,775 shekels of silver.

Of course, the census that resulted in the collection of materials for the tabernacle took place six months before this census was commanded.

Since both censuses result in identical numbers – 603,550 – it is likely that the tribal leaders used the same survey twice.

And further, it is not clear that the numbers are intended literally.

After all, if Israel had 600,000 men who were able to go to war, then they would not have trembled at Pharaoh's puny army (ca. 20,000), and when they got to the Promised Land, they could easily have crushed the Canaanites simply by showing up!

But I am not convinced that we are supposed to take the 600,000 warriors literally.

One reason is found in chapter 3.

In chapter 3, verse 43, we are told that there were 22,273 firstborn sons, from one month old and upward, in all of Israel.

If there are 603,550 men of military age, but there are only 22,273 firstborn sons, that means that most of these men must be childless – and conversely, it would mean that there are 580,000 men who are not firstborns!

Even if you assume that every family had ten sons (highly improbable), there should be at least 60,000 firstborn sons among the men of military age, and another 500,000 firstborn sons –

since most of the men of military age would have at least one son!

(Some argue that you should not count families with firstborn daughters, so that would reduce the number to 280,000 firstborn sons).

When we went through the book of Chronicles,  
we saw that biblical historians often do interesting things with numbers.  
So it wouldn't surprise me if Moses is doing the same thing here.

One possible solution is that the Hebrew word *elep* – translated here as “thousand” –  
is also the word translated “clans” in verse 16.  
It is possible that Reuben had 46 clans and 500 warriors, and so on.  
This would result in 598 clans in Israel, with 5,550 warriors.  
(It is possible that a later editor then amended the text to “correct” the addition error).

Of course, it is always rather dangerous to base your interpretation of the text  
on a supposed editorial mistake for which there is no textual evidence!

And besides, *this* is the text that God gave us!  
So, given that God has clearly shown us from Chronicles  
that biblical historians often exaggerate numbers,  
we should humbly ask what purpose God might have for giving them to us?  
There are a lot of things going on in biblical numbers  
(and we may not understand even a small fraction of it!) –  
but at the very least,  
we can say that the promise to Abraham is coming true.  
Israel is becoming like the sand on the seashore.

#### **b. The Exemption of the Levites (v47-53)**

<sup>47</sup> *But the Levites were not listed along with them by their ancestral tribe.* <sup>48</sup> *For the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* <sup>49</sup> *“Only the tribe of Levi you shall not list, and you shall not take a census of them among the people of Israel.*

Verses 47-53 then explain why the Levites were not listed here.

Verse 49 says “you shall not take a census of them among the people of Israel.”

We'll hear in chapters 3-4 about the census of the Levites.

So God does not forbid taking a census of them –

rather, he forbids taking a census of them *among the people of Israel*.

God has a different plan for the Levites.

The census of chapter 1 is a census of warriors.

The Levites are not to be warriors.

The Levites are appointed to carry and guard the tabernacle.

<sup>50</sup> *But appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall take care of it and shall camp around the tabernacle.* <sup>51</sup> *When the tabernacle is to set out, the*

*Levites shall take it down, and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up. And if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.<sup>52</sup> The people of Israel shall pitch their tents by their companies, each man in his own camp and each man by his own standard.<sup>53</sup> But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. And the Levites shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony.”*

Later in Israel’s history, the Levites would receive new assignments in assisting the priests.

But in the wilderness, their job was four-fold:

1) they were to carry the tabernacle and its furnishings

This would be quite a task!

A lot of material went into the construction of the tabernacle.

Not only do the Levites have to carry their own stuff –  
they also have to carry the tabernacle!

2) they were to set up and tear down the tabernacle when Israel camped

No one else was allowed to help.

Indeed, if anyone else tried to help set up the tabernacle,  
he was to be put to death!

3) they were to camp around the tabernacle

Just as the twelve tribes of Israel camped on all four sides of the tabernacle  
so also the Levites formed the inner circle around the tabernacle.

As the tabernacle itself had three regions –  
the outer court for everyone –

the holy place for the priests –

and the Holy of Holies for the high priest –

so also the camp has three zones:

the outer camp with the tents of the 12 tribes –

the inner ring with the tents of the Levites –

and then the tent of God himself.

4) they were to guard the tabernacle and make sure that no outsider came near

Just as Adam had been called to guard the Garden in Eden,

so now the Levites are called to guard the new Holy Place –  
the place where God meets with his people.

Since we’re in the middle of a building project,

it's worth pointing out that there the three-fold division of space is gone.

There is no curtain – no veil – that prevents access to the Holy of Holies.

The only veil that can keep you from seeing the glory of Jesus  
is your own lack of faith!

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 –

Moses veiled his face to protect the people from God’s glory

“For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted,  
because only through Christ is it taken away.  
Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.  
But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.  
Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.  
And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.  
For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor 3:14-18)

Jesus has opened the way through the curtain – that is through his flesh –  
so that we might come together into the heavenly Holy of Holies.  
I have no special access to God.

I am God’s herald – sent to proclaim to you the message of salvation –  
but my priestly function is one that I share together with you.  
I like how Ed Clowney puts it.  
He distinguishes between the “general office” of believer  
and the “special offices” – pastor, elder, and deacon.  
And he points out that what the special officers do specially,  
the general officers do generally.

Yes, I preach.  
I have been commissioned by Christ  
as a herald to proclaim the good news of salvation.  
But you also speak.  
You bear witness to Christ in your daily life.  
What I do specially, you are to do generally.

Likewise, the elders lead and shepherd.  
We have been commissioned by Christ  
to shepherd the flock that is under our care.  
But you also lead and shepherd.  
You lead those who are under your care in your own sphere of influence.  
What we elders do specially, you are to do generally.

And the deacons lead us in showing mercy to those in need.  
They have been commissioned by Christ  
to assist the elders, so that the elders can devote ourselves to shepherding.  
But you also show mercy.  
You are to set an example to those around you  
of the mercy and grace of Christ.  
What the deacons do specially, you are to do generally.

Verse 54 wraps up chapter 1 with a really important point that is easy to overlook:

**c. They Did All that the LORD Commanded Moses (v54)**

<sup>54</sup> *Thus did the people of Israel; they did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.*

We are used to thinking of the wilderness generation as a generation of rebels

(and they were)

but Numbers highlights another feature of the wilderness generation:

“they did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.”

Over and over again, this is said of Israel:

“they did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.”

In the Book of Joshua the Israelites tell Joshua, “we will follow you like we followed Moses.”

If all you think about are the rebellions in the wilderness,

this would not seem very encouraging!

Didn't they *rebel* against Moses?

Well, yes, occasionally they did.

But the wilderness generation also *followed* Moses and obeyed him *most of the time!*

After all, if they truly and finally rebelled, they would have *gone back to Egypt!*

But they didn't.

They followed Moses and obeyed him.

This disjunction between obedience and rebellion is at the heart of the book of Numbers.

If perfect obedience to the Law is necessary to receive the inheritance,

then Israel will die in the wilderness.

(And the first generation does, in fact, die in the wilderness

because of their disobedience – because of their lack of faith).

But God is gracious and merciful.

He does not treat our sins as they deserve,

and so he brings Israel into the Promised Land,

not because they have been so faithful and obedient –

but because *he* is faithful to his promises!

And yet, they still have to follow Moses and Joshua!

If you go back to Egypt, then you have no place in the Promised Land.

This fits nicely with what we saw this morning (shorter catechism 85):

“to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin,

God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life,

with the diligent use of all the outward means

whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.”

As God demonstrated in the Exodus and Conquest,

you cannot possibly save yourself;

you cannot possibly be good enough to earn salvation.  
But you do have to do something –  
you have to believe in Jesus – you have to repent of your sin –  
and you have to devote yourself to following him (Word, sacraments and prayer).

And, in fact, that is very much what chapter 2 is saying  
as it talks about how the wilderness camp should be arranged.

## **2. A Worship-Centered Life: The Arrangement of the Wilderness Camp (2:1-34)**

### **a. The Camp of Judah towards the Rising of the Sun (v1-9)**

*The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, <sup>2</sup> “The people of Israel shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side. <sup>3</sup> Those to camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah by their companies, the chief of the people of Judah being Nahshon the son of Amminadab, <sup>4</sup> his company as listed being 74,600. <sup>5</sup> Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, the chief of the people of Issachar being Nethanel the son of Zuar, <sup>6</sup> his company as listed being 54,400. <sup>7</sup> Then the tribe of Zebulun, the chief of the people of Zebulun being Eliab the son of Helon, <sup>8</sup> his company as listed being 57,400. <sup>9</sup> All those listed of the camp of Judah, by their companies, were 186,400. They shall set out first on the march.*

Verse 2 specifies that each tribe is to camp *facing the tent of meeting on every side*.

We have already heard that the Levites are supposed to surround the tent of meeting.  
Now, we hear that the Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting as well.

Three tribes on the east – three tribes on the west –  
three tribes on the south – and three tribes on the north.

The east is the privileged position.

The tabernacle was oriented toward the east  
(just like the Garden of Eden was *in the east* of Eden).  
And so Judah receives the position of honor.

Judah is joined by Zebulun and Issachar (the two youngest sons of Leah).

These tribes are also the tribes who are to lead the wilderness march  
(following the ark of the covenant).

### **b. The Camp of Reuben on the South (v10-16)**

<sup>10</sup> *“On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben by their companies, the chief of the people of Reuben being Elizur the son of Shedeur, <sup>11</sup> his company as listed being 46,500.*

<sup>12</sup> *And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon, the chief of the people of Simeon being Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, <sup>13</sup> his company as listed being 59,300. <sup>14</sup> Then the tribe of Gad, the chief of the people of Gad being Eliasaph the son of Reuel, <sup>15</sup> his company as listed*

being 45,650. <sup>16</sup> All those listed of the camp of Reuben, by their companies, were 151,450. They shall set out second.

On the south side are Reuben and Simeon, the two oldest sons of Leah, together with Gad, the oldest son of Leah's servant, Zilpah.

**c. The Camp of the Levites (v17)**

<sup>17</sup> "Then the tent of meeting shall set out, with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; as they camp, so shall they set out, each in position, standard by standard.

So, while the *ark* and the *priests* were to lead the march through the wilderness, the tabernacle and the Levites were to follow *in the midst of* the people of Israel.

We have descriptions of the Egyptian war camp, with Pharaoh's great tent in the middle – and all the hosts of Egypt encamped on every side.

The LORD has just overthrown Pharaoh's camp. And now the LORD establishes his camp – with his glorious tent in the middle.

I hope you can see the political importance of this!  
Egypt follows Pharaoh.  
Israel does not follow *Moses*.  
Israel follows the LORD.

God is enthroned in the midst of his people.  
Chapter 2 demonstrates how we are to live a worship-centered life.  
For Israel, this took shape in the structure of their camp (oriented around the tabernacle).  
You can see echoes of this in the way that we structure our worship space (oriented around the Word and sacraments).  
We don't follow the exact details of Israel's wilderness camp, but we are oriented around the *one* to whom Israel's camp pointed!

**d. The Camp of Ephraim on the West (v18-24)**

<sup>18</sup> "On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim by their companies, the chief of the people of Ephraim being Elishama the son of Ammihud, <sup>19</sup> his company as listed being 40,500. <sup>20</sup> And next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh, the chief of the people of Manasseh being Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, <sup>21</sup> his company as listed being 32,200. <sup>22</sup> Then the tribe of Benjamin, the chief of the people of Benjamin being Abidan the son of Gideoni, <sup>23</sup> his company as listed being 35,400. <sup>24</sup> All those listed of the camp of Ephraim, by their companies, were 108,100. They shall set out third on the march.

Then, on the west would camp Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin –  
the sons of Rachel.

You may have noticed that there are 12 tribes surrounding the tabernacle –  
and a 13<sup>th</sup> tribe – Levi – in the middle.

That's because the tribe of Joseph was given the double portion in the inheritance.

The double portion means that there are, in effect, 13 parts.

Two go to Joseph and one each to the other 11 brothers.

Jacob had declared that he would treat Joseph's sons as his own –  
thereby giving Ephraim and Manasseh their own portions.

These three tribes camped on the west side –  
and marched in the third place during the wilderness journey.

#### **e. The Camp of Dan on the North (v25-31)**

<sup>25</sup> *“On the north side shall be the standard of the camp of Dan by their companies, the chief of the people of Dan being Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, <sup>26</sup> his company as listed being 62,700.*

<sup>27</sup> *And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher, the chief of the people of Asher being Pagiel the son of Ochran, <sup>28</sup> his company as listed being 41,500. <sup>29</sup> Then the tribe of Naphtali, the chief of the people of Naphtali being Ahira the son of Enan, <sup>30</sup> his company as listed being 53,400. <sup>31</sup> All those listed of the camp of Dan were 157,600. They shall set out last, standard by standard.”*

Then last of all, on the north side came Dan, Asher and Naphtali.

Dan and Naphtali were sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant,  
and Asher was the youngest son of Zilpah, Leah's servant.

#### **f. They Did All that the LORD Commanded Moses (v32-34)**

<sup>32</sup> *These are the people of Israel as listed by their fathers' houses. All those listed in the camps by their companies were 603,550. <sup>33</sup> But the Levites were not listed among the people of Israel, as the LORD commanded Moses. <sup>34</sup> Thus did the people of Israel. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, each one in his clan, according to his fathers' house.*

Verses 32-34 then reiterate that Israel *did* according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.

By now it should have been clear to Israel that obedience is not what saves you.

*God* saved them from Pharaoh – and freed them from bondage in Egypt.

They were saved by grace.

But obedience is the way to walk within the saved community.

### **Conclusion: The Cruciform Shape of the Christian Life**

God is arranging the community of Israel to be centered on him.

We say that we confess “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”

This is what Numbers is describing in the arrangement of Israel’s tribes.

12 (or 13) tribes need to live as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

And so God sets up the pattern of twelve tribes surrounding the Holy Place.

When you look at the book of Revelation and its description of the New Jerusalem,  
with 12 gates – “and on the gates

the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed” –

three on each side of the city –

you start to see what Revelation is doing.

It is true that in Numbers Israel is *guarding* the way of access to God.

But as the nations *join* Israel,

they will gain access to the Holy One of Israel.

In the same way, the gates to the Holy City *guard* the way of access to God.

But as the nations repent and are baptized into the name of Christ Jesus,

they are brought through those gates, into the heavenly city!

Through the cross Jesus opens the way for the Gentiles to come to the Father.

As we are grafted into Israel – as we are united to Jesus –

we, too, are brought into the Holy of Holies – the heavenly city!

Let us, therefore, deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus into the wilderness!