

Sermon #02 — *Christ in Numbers*

Title: **THE NUMBERED PEOPLE**

Text: Numbers 1:1-54

Subject: *The Numbering of the People*

Date: Tuesday Evening — December 10, 2019

Readings: *Lindsay Campbell and Mark Henson*

Introduction:

The first four chapters of the Book of Numbers deals with the numbering of the children of Israel, by which the camp of Israel was set up around the tabernacle and responsibilities to each family (tribe) were assigned by divine order.

EXODUS

In the Book of Exodus, Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage and slavery. The Lord God miraculously set them free from 400 years of captivity. They marched through the Red Sea and saw God destroy Pharaoh and the Egyptian armies in the sea. Miraculously, day after day, God guided them, provided for them, and protected them, as they marched through the desert wilderness.

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When they got to Mount Sinai, the Lord Jehovah appeared to them in a spectacular way. God called Moses up on the mountain and gave him the law. While Moses was on the mountain receiving God's holy law on tables of stone, Israel was led by Aaron to make and worship a golden calf and called it the worship of Jehovah!

LEVITICUS

In the Book of Leviticus, while they were still encamped around Sinai, the Lord God, the God of all grace, (in all the typology of the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and ordinances of divine worship), showed them how he would accomplish the salvation of his chosen people by the doing and dying of his Son, the Lord Jesus. At the end of the Book of Leviticus, Israel had been out of Egypt for a little more than a year.

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Exodus covered a year. Leviticus cover only a month. Then, we come to the Book of Numbers. Numbers encompasses more than 38 years.

This third book of Moses tells us what happened during those 38 years. The Hebrew title of this book gives us an idea of the theme of Numbers. In Hebrew this book is titled “In the Wilderness” instead of Numbers. — **The Book of Numbers is all about Israel in the wilderness.** It is a picture of God’s church, the Israel of God, God’s elect in this wilderness of woe called earth.

Proposition: There is in this world of woe a people chosen and redeemed by God, a people for whom all the wonders of providence are performed, a people chosen and numbered for war, a people who shall be crowned with all the glory of heaven when their journey is done.

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That is the message of the Book of Numbers. That is what the Book of Numbers is all about. Let's read about this numbered people in Numbers 1. Please try to read the first four chapters of Numbers tonight or tomorrow. You will see that this numbering of Israel by the command of God is the subject of those first four chapters of the Book. But if we read all four chapters now, I couldn't preach the message the Lord has given me. And he has given me a message.

(Numbers 1:1-4) And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, (2) Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of *their* names, every male by their polls; (3) From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies. (4) And with you

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there shall be a man of every tribe; everyone head of the house of his fathers.

(Numbers 1:44-54) 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 thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. (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

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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 Israel 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 the tabernacle of testimony. (54) And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they.

Divisions: Let me show you five things in this message.

1. The Numbered People
2. People in a Wilderness
3. A Time of War
4. A Waiting Crown

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5. A Substitution Made

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1st — **The Book of Numbers is all about a numbered people.** — The children of Israel, I must remind you, were “*the church in the wilderness*” (Acts 7:38). They represent God’s elect, God’s covenant people, the Israel of God, the church, God’s holy nation and royal priesthood. — Everything that happened to these people, throughout their history in the Old Testament Scriptures, happened by divine appointment for us, for our learning, for our instruction, as examples of God’s saving grace given to us and wrought in us (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

(1 Corinthians 10:1-11) Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; (2) And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (3) And did all eat the same spiritual meat; (4) And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank

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of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (5) But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (6) Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. (7) Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (8) Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. (9) Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. (10) Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. (11) Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

(1 Corinthians 10:12) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

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Observe these numbered people closely. They were a people snatched by God's hand from tyrannizing foes. A miracle of care supplied their daily needs. A moving pillar fire and of cloud guided them in their way. God has given them his law. **He has fenced them off from all other people by circumcision and by their distinct, peculiar worship.**

- His Altar
- His Sacrifice
- His Priest
- His Mercy-seat

Their contact with the world is broken. They move amid the nations of the earth as strangers and pilgrims, odd-balls, eccentrics, peculiar, strange people, unknown by the world around them. God is with them. His sheltering arms is their defense. Goodness and mercy guard their every step. The land of promised rest is the horizon of their hopes.

Children of God, as we read Israel's history, we are looking into a mirror. They picture our

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heavenly Father's special dealings with every heaven-born soul, a picture of every believing sinner. In every age and place there is an Israel thus mercifully loved, and led, and fed.

- Like them we often err and fail.
- Like them we often sin and stray.
- Like them we are miraculously preserved.

We should always see ourselves in Israel's history. Our every step finds counterpart in them.

The parallel is obvious. They once groaned bitterly in cruel bondage. But mercy set them free. Believer, you too were once a slave at Satan's will. He ruled you with an iron yoke. But now the chain is broken and you rejoice. You are now the ransomed freed-man of the Lord!

- **By his commandment to number the people, the Lord God graciously kept a detailed and precise record by which the genealogy of our Savior might be traced** (Hebrews 7:14).

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- **By numbering his people the Lord Jehovah seems to say, “The rest of the world matters nothing to me. You are my singular people, my jewels, precious to me.”** — That is precisely what he says (Isaiah 43:1-4; Romans 9:11-27; Titus 2:11-14).

PEOPLE IN A WILDERNESS

2nd — **The people before us are people in a wilderness, for them a wilderness of woe, an empty, desolate, desert, a place of much pain and sorrow.** The wilderness was never meant to be Israel’s destination. God’s intention was to bring them into the Promised Land of Canaan. The wilderness was intended as a temporary place — a place through which to move, not a place in which to live.

Israel’s tribes journeyed as strangers, through a desert-waste. Is not that the case with you? The abiding place is not here. Our rest is just over there, just across the hill, on the other side of the river.

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Israel was escorted and protected by a heavenly guide. So, too, the hand of the Almighty has marked out our course for us and is our guide by day and by night.

- Is your soul needy? The bread of life fails not.
- Are you thirsty? The water of life is ever springing.

They had heard the thundering of God's law and trembled for a mediator. So, too, God's holy law has pierced the deep recesses of our souls. We have learned by gospel both our sin and the glorious righteousness of God in Christ. We have been convinced by the Spirit of God of...

- Our Sin.
- The Righteousness of God.
- The Judgment of God at Calvary!

Was Israel God's special portion? You, too, are not your own. You are a purchased property — his peculiar people.

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Before the people move from Sinai, God gives command to register the Number of each tribe. Account must be distinctly taken. All names must be recorded. Their multitudes must all be reckoned and exactly known. **Things that are numbered are...**

- Chosen Things — God's Election!
- Prized Things — Elect and Precious!
- Protected Things — The Apple of His Eye!

In the numbering we read rightly if we read God's special love. His people are numbered because they are loved. **O my soul, come bow before the God of all grace for his great love!** Its worth exceeds all worlds. — My God loves me! — My name is in his heart. The Lord of all creation prizes me as one of his chosen jewels.

Why was the Lord Jesus sent to bear your sins, and robe you in his righteousness? Why did Jehovah inflict on him the hell-pains, which were justly yours? Why was Christ slain? Why are you

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spared? There can be only one reply — God loves you!

And why did the Spirit of God awaken you from your spiritual death? — Why did he show you your ruin? Why did he reveal Christ to you? Why did he melt your stony heart and give you faith in his dear Son? There can be only one reply. — God loves you!

How is it, that your little boat still rides above the raging billows of an engulfing world? How is it, that your tottering feet are still upheld along the slippery hill, which leads to Zion's heights? The strength is not your own. It is most freely given. There can be only one reply. — God loves you!

When did this love commence? — Tell me, when God began to be, and I will tell you when his love began. This love will expire when God is no more God!

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- God loves you! — What an amazing impulse to bear the willing servant over all mountains of doubt, and fear, and hindrance!
- God loves me! — What a strong shield to ward off Satan's darts!
- God loves us! — What a soft, sweet pillow of unfailing peace!
- God loves us! — What a great light in the dark day of trial!
- God loves me! — What a cordial of invigorating comfort.
- God loves us! — What a blessed foretaste of a sure heaven!

A TIME OF WAR

3rd — **The children of Israel were numbered for a time of war.** None were numbered, but those whose age and strength fitted them for war. It was God's wise, good, and gracious intention that his people spend 40 years at war! Surely, every person here who has experienced and is experiencing God's saving grace in Christ sees the picture before us. — It

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is by the wise, good, and gracious purpose of God that his people live the days of their lives appointed by him at war, — never at ease, at war, — never at peace, at war!

At war with the world! — The world presents its countless troops. All are quick to wound and skilled to capture.

- The Cares of the World!
- The Deceitfulness of Riches!
- The Love of the World!
- The Religion of the World!

(1 John 2:15-18) Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (17) And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. (18) Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now

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are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

At war with the flesh! — The flesh is an internal foe, haunting the secret chambers of the heart, and entwined around our very being. It gives no respite. No respite must be given to it.

(Romans 7:14-25) For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present

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with me. (22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

- Pride!
- Self-righteousness!
- Unbelief!

At war with the devil! — Satan roars! He deceives! He whispers! He insinuates! He assaults! We must relentlessly resist him!

Believer, yours is a warrior's life. Fight, as one fighting for eternity. Strive, as one striving for a kingdom. March, as one resolute to take heaven by storm. The Lord Jesus Christ calls. He commands.

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He leads! Follow him boldly. Follow him faithfully.

Why? Why has our God chosen thus to save us? — *“To the praise of the glory of his grace!”*

- In Sovereign Election
- In Wondrous Predestination
- In Blood Atonement
- In Effectual Grace

A WAITING CROWN

4th — **For this numbered people there was a waiting crown — Canaan!** The numbered host was numbered for the fight. The fighting host will soon shout, “Victory!” No one will triumph, who has never fought. No one, who truly fights, will fail.

(2 Timothy 4:1-8) I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; (2) Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort

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with all longsuffering and doctrine. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; (4) And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (5) But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. (6) For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. (7) I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: (8) Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

A SUBSTITUTION MADE

5th — **In the numbering of Israel and the specific exemption of the Levites from the numbering, a substitution was made.**

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(Numbers 1:47-50) 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.

Back in Exodus 13:2 the Lord God said, “*Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.*” God took the Levites as substitutes for the firstborn.

(Numbers 3:12-13) And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the

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Levites shall be mine; (13) Because all the firstborn *are* mine; *for* on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I *am* the LORD.

Wondrous grace! Wondrous, wondrous grace! — The holy Lord God took his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ in our stead! — And he takes us, his loved, chosen, numbered people in Christ's stead! — The ransom price for all those numbered of God is exactly the same (Exodus 30:12-15).

(Exodus 30:12-15) When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when *thou* numberest them. (13) This they shall give, everyone that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs:) an half shekel *shall be* the offering of the LORD. (14)

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Everyone that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD. (15) The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when *they* give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

The silver of the sanctuary of God, the price of our atonement is the precious blood of Christ.

(1 Peter 1:18-21) Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; (19) But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: (20) Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, (21) Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

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Under the blood of Jesus,
Safe in the Shepherd's fold.
Under the blood of Jesus,
Safe while the ages roll.
Safe though the worlds may crumble,
Safe though the stars grow dim.
Under the blood of Jesus,
I am secure in Him.

Amen.