

Numbers 1:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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;

Analysis

God commands a comprehensive census of Israel's fighting men, revealing divine concern for organization, preparation, and accountability. The phrase 'Take ye the sum of all the congregation' uses the Hebrew 'naso et-rosh' (נָשָׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ, literally 'lift up the head'), suggesting dignity and individual worth alongside military readiness. God knows His people by name and number, valuing each person while organizing them for collective purpose. The criteria—'every male by their polls' (literally 'by their skulls/heads'), 'from twenty years old and upward,' and 'able to go forth to war'—establish military age and readiness as the census basis. This wasn't merely administrative but theological: God was preparing His people to conquer Canaan, requiring both spiritual commitment and physical capability. The exclusion of Levites from this military census (1:47-49) highlights their separate consecration to tabernacle service. This census reveals God's sovereignty in organizing His people according to His purposes, while human responsibility is seen in readiness for divine assignments.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern censuses were common for military and tax purposes, as evidenced in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Hittite records. However, Israel's census was uniquely commanded by God rather than initiated by human rulers. The military age of twenty reflects ancient standards for warfare capability. The resulting count of 603,550 fighting men (Numbers 1:46) would suggest a total

population of approximately 2-3 million including women, children, and elderly—a figure that has prompted much scholarly discussion given the wilderness's harsh conditions and apparent lack of archaeological evidence for such a large group. Some scholars propose alternative understandings of the Hebrew 'eleph' (אֶלֶף, typically 'thousand') as referring to military units or clans rather than literal thousands.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the individual attention ('by their polls') combined with collective organization reflect God's care for both persons and community?
2. What does military preparedness among God's people teach about the relationship between faith and action in accomplishing God's purposes?

Interlinear Text

וְשָׂא וְ	אֶת	רֹאשׁ	כָּל	עַד ת	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל
Take	H853	ye the sum	H3605	of all the congregation	of the children	of Israel
H5375		H7218		H5712	H1121	H3478
לְמִשְׁפּוּחֵם	לְבֵית	אֲבוֹתָם	בְּמִסְפָּר	שְׁמוֹת		
after their families	by the house	of their fathers	with the number	of their names		
H4940	H1004	H1	H4557	H8034		
כָּל	זָכָר	לְגַלְגֻּלָּתָם:				
H3605	every male	by their polls				
	H2145	H1538				

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 38:26 (Parallel theme): A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men.

Exodus 30:12 (References Israel): 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.

Numbers 1:18 (Parallel theme): And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls.

Numbers 1:22 (Parallel theme): Of the children of Simeon, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, those that were numbered of them, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;