

Numbers 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

God specifies that Moses and Aaron will conduct the census with tribal representatives, establishing the principle of godly leadership working in concert with community leaders. The combination of Moses (prophet and lawgiver), Aaron (high priest), and tribal princes ensures that spiritual authority, priestly mediation, and tribal representation all participate in organizing God's people. This collaborative leadership model prevents both autocracy and anarchy, balancing centralized divine authority with decentralized tribal representation. The careful delineation 'throughout their families, by the house of their fathers' emphasizes the importance of ancestral identity and tribal cohesion within Israel. God's people maintain distinct tribal identities while united under common leadership and purpose. The emphasis on 'names' indicates personal significance—this isn't merely statistical bureaucracy but the recognition that God knows and values each individual within His covenant community. This organizational structure would continue throughout Israel's history, demonstrating that spiritual order requires both divine appointment and communal participation.

Historical Context

The tribal system described here reflects ancient Near Eastern social organization where kinship ties determined identity, inheritance, and military organization. The patriarchal structure ('house of their fathers') was standard throughout the ancient world. The twelve tribal princes who would assist Moses and Aaron are listed in

Numbers 1:5-15, representing the twelve tribes descended from Jacob's sons (excluding Levi, whose tribe had a separate consecration). This system of tribal representatives would continue in Israel's governance, later formalized in structures like David's administrative organization (1 Chronicles 27) and continuing through the exile period. The census by families ensured accurate tribal affiliation, critical for later land allotment in Canaan where each tribe received specific territorial inheritance.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the partnership of prophetic, priestly, and tribal leadership provide a model for church governance and accountability today?
2. What does the emphasis on names and ancestral identity teach about God's concern for both individual and corporate identity among His people?

Interlinear Text

וְאַתָּה	כִּלְלָמָד	שָׁנָה	עַלְהָה	וּמִ	אַתָּה	מִבְּ	עַשְׂרֵה	יָמִים	מִ	אַתָּה	מִ		
all that are able to go forth	H3605	H3318					H8141	H6242	H1121	old	From twenty		
לְצִבְאֹת	מִ	אַתָּה	תִּפְקִיד	וְ	בִּשְׁרָאָל	לְ	לְצִבְאֹת	מִ	אַתָּה	מִ	לְצִבְאֹת	מִ	
them by their armies	H6635	H3478	H853	H6485	H6635	H853	in Israel	shall number	thou and Aaron	H175	H859	thou and Aaron	

אַתָּה
H859 thou and Aaron
 H175

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 30:14 (Parallel theme): Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD.

Numbers 14:29 (Parallel theme): Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

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