

Organising the People

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] Well, we turn now to our Bible reading, which you'll find in the book of Numbers. And the book of Numbers begins, and that's where we're beginning tonight, Numbers chapter 1, on page 108 in our hardback Bibles, if you have one, page 108, Numbers chapter 1.

Now we'll be looking at chapters 1 and 2 this evening. It would be too much to read all of that out this evening, so I'll read parts of it and then summarize the other parts as we go along.

So Numbers chapter 1 and verse 1. 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, 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.

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. And there shall be with you a man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers.

And these are the names of the men who shall assist you. From Reuben, Eliezer, the son of Shedeur. From Simeon, Shalumiel, the son of Zerishaddai.

[1 : 32] From Judah, Nashon, the son of Aminadab. From Issachar, Nethanel, the son of Zuar. From Zebulun, Eliab, the son of Helon. From the sons of Joseph.

From Ephraim, Elisham, the son of Amihud. And from Manasseh, Gamaliel, the son of Pedazur. From Benjamin, Abidam, the son of Gideoni. From Dan, Ahiezer, the son of Amishaddai.

From Asher, Pagiel, the son of Ochrán. From Gad, Eliasaph, the son of Duel. From Naphtali, Ahira, the son of Enan. These were the ones chosen from the congregation.

The chiefs of their ancestral tribes. The heads of the clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron took these men who had been named. 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 20 years old and upward. Head by head as the Lord commanded Moses.

[2 : 32] So he listed them in the wilderness of Sinai. 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 20 years old and upward. All who were able to go to war. Those listed of the tribe of Reuben.

Were 46,500. And then over the next section. From verse 22 to verse 43. We have all the warriors. Listed and numbered from the other tribes.

Followed by the summary of this exercise. Beginning at verse 44. These are those who were listed. Who Moses and Aaron listed. With the help of the chiefs of Israel.

Twelve men. Each representing his father's house. So all those listed of the people of Israel. By their fathers' houses. From 20 years old and upward. Every man able to go to war in Israel.

- [3 : 29] All those listed were. 603,550. But the Levites. Members of the tribe of Levi. Were not listed.
- Along with them. By their ancestral tribe. For the Lord spoke to Moses. Saying. Only the tribe of Levi. You shall not list. And you shall not take a census of them.
- Among the people of Israel. 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. 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. The people of Israel.
- [4 : 23] Shall pitch their tents. By their companies. Each man. In his own camp. And each man. By his own standard. 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. Thus did the people of Israel.
- They did according to all. That the Lord. Commanded Moses. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron. Saying. The people of Israel. Shall camp. Each by his own standard.
- With the banners. Of their father's houses. They shall camp. Facing the tent of meeting. On every side. 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 Nashon. The son of Aminadab. His company. As listed. Being seventy four thousand. Six hundred.
- [5 : 18] Four hundred. 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. His company. As listed. Being fifty four thousand. Four hundred.
- Then the tribe of Zebulun. The chief of the people of Zebulun. Being Eliab. The son of Helon. His company. As listed. Being. Fifty seven thousand. Four hundred. All those listed.
- Of the camp of Judah. By their companies. That's these three tribes together. Were. One hundred and eighty six thousand. Four hundred. They shall set out first.
- On the march. And we then have an account of the arrangement of the other tribes. As they were to camp at night. And finally a summary section. Beginning at verse thirty two.
- These are the people of Israel as listed by their father's houses. All those listed in the camps. All those listed in the camps. By their companies. Were six hundred and three thousand. Five hundred and fifty.
- [6 : 14] But the Levites were not listed among the people of Israel. As the Lord commanded Moses. 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 father's house. Amen.
- This is the word of the Lord. And may it be a blessing and an encouragement to us this evening. Well let's turn again to our book of numbers.
- Chapter one. On page one hundred and eight. In our church Bibles. Organizing the people.
- That's our title for tonight. Organizing the people. And I hear a two Bible verses. A and B. Ask yourself which is the more gripping.

[7 : 17] A. But Jael. The wife of Heber. Took a tent peg. And took a hammer in her hand. And she went softly to Sisera.

And drove the peg into his temple. Until it went into the ground. While he was lying asleep from weariness. And so he died. Judges 4. 21. B.

Those listed of the tribe of Reuben. Were 46,500. Numbers. 1. 21. Now some parts of the Bible.

At least on the surface. Seem to be more interesting. Than others. And these opening verses of the book of numbers. Don't seem to be too promising. But. If the apostle Paul was right.

When he said. All scripture. Is breathed out by God. Then even the census returns. Of numbers chapter 1. Are divinely inspired. And if Jesus was right.

[8 : 16] When he said. Not an iota. Not a dot. Will pass from the law. Until all is accomplished. Then these opening salvos. Of the book of numbers. Demand our careful attention.

So let me say this. Just to encourage you. As we begin. Numbers. Is first and foremost. And most importantly. About God. And God. Is always. Deeply interesting.

And then secondly. Numbers. Is about God's people. Those that he's called. And chosen. And commissioned. And the church today. Stands fundamentally. In the same relationship.

To God. As the people of Israel. Did. In Old Testament times. So as we studied. The book of numbers. Over these coming weeks. It will help us. To understand better. The relationship.

Between God. And his people. Now if we're Christian people. If we're members. Of the church of Christ. The thing that defines. Our lives. Is our relationship.

[9 : 09] To the one true God. We do have other relationships. That are important. We relate to each other. We relate to other churches. We relate importantly.

To the non-Christian world. And of course. To our families. And friends. And work colleagues. But our primary relationship. Is to God himself. Our God.

Loves much. But he also. Expects. Much. And the book of numbers. Will teach us. Both about his love. And about his expectations. Now look with me.

At the very first verse. Of the book. Because it sums up for us. The points. In Old Testament history. That Israel has reached. So verse one. Now we're thinking.

In chronology here. 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.

[10 : 02] After they had come out. Of the land. Of Egypt. So it's a year. And a month. It's 13 months. Since the Israelites. Have crossed the Red Sea. And have been liberated. From their slavery.

In Egypt. And they are still. In the wilderness. Of Sinai. Moses has been up. The mountain. Up Mount Sinai. To receive the law. From God. And the point.

Has now been reached. When the people. Are ready. To set out. On their journey. Northwards. To the promised land. So that very first verse. Of the book of numbers. Locates us at Sinai.

And don't turn this up now. But the very last verse. Of the book of numbers. Locates the Israelites. In the plains of Moab. Some 40 years later. On the banks of the river Jordan. Just about to cross over.

Into Canaan. Now it's only just over 200 miles. From Sinai. To the banks of the Jordan. A snail.

[10 : 58] Could get from Sinai. To Canaan. In less than 40 years. Surely. So why did it take. The Israelites so long. 40 years. To do 200 miles. Well the painful delay.

Was all due to Israel's. Disobedience. Their relationship to God. Was tried. And tested. And found wanting. At many points. On their long journey. But it's precisely.

Those points of difficulty. Which will teach us. And help us not to follow. In the footsteps. Of our Israelite forefathers. Others. So I want this evening. To take these first two chapters.

Of the book. And to ask the question. What do these chapters. Teach us. About our God. And we'll find that he's a God. Who is organizing his people. To fulfill. His great purposes.

So let's notice four things. First. He is a God. Who knows. And numbers. His people. Numbers.

[11 : 53] Numbers of people. Are important. In the Bible. Counting people. Is important. Because. Each individual. Is important to God. There's no need to turn this up. But. I want to read to you.

The opening sentence. The very first verse. Of the book of Exodus. Because it also includes. Some numbers. These are the names. Of the sons of Israel. Who came to Egypt. With Jacob.

Each with his household. Reuben. Simeon. Levi. And Judah. Issachar. Zebulun. And Benjamin. Dan. And Naphtali. Gad. And Asher. All the descendants.

Of Jacob. Were. Seventy. Persons. And then Moses writes. A verse or two later. The people of Israel. Were fruitful.

In Egypt. And increased. Greatly. They multiplied. And grew exceedingly strong. So that the land. Was filled with them. We might say. Yes. Moses brother. You're not exaggerating.

[12 : 47] There were 70. That went down to Egypt. And then 400 years later. Something like 2 million. Were rescued from Egypt. They certainly prospered. Numerically. So the people of Israel.

Were counted. They were numbered. When they went down to Egypt. And now they're being numbered again. Having left Egypt. God is interested. In precise numbers. Because he's interested.

In every one of his people. Now the interest. That he showed in his people. Then is the same. As the interest. He shows today. And it's very comforting. Think of it like this.

You and I. Are sharing this little planet. With over 7 billion people. And it's easy. To think of yourself. As just a tiny scrap. Of data. In a thousand computer files.

Who knows where your name. And data. Gets to these days. Lob. E. Mr. Reference number. CK 147543980. That's me.

[13 : 41] Maybe. Maybe that's you. There was one occasion. In the gospels. When Jesus had sent out. 72 missionaries. And when they returned to him. They reported joyfully. Even the demons.

Are subject to us. Because of your name. But Jesus said to them. Do not rejoice. That the spirits. Are subject to you. You must rejoice. That your names. Are written.

In heaven. Now that's what the Lord God does. He writes the names. Of each of his people. In heaven. Jesus says. In John's gospel. The good shepherd. Calls his own sheep.

By name. I know my own. And my own. Know me. So God is interested. Both in numbers. And in names. These dozens of Jewish names.

Here in numbers. Chapter 1 and 2. They can seem rather forbidding. They're so foreign. To our tongues. Look. Look again. At chapter 1 verses. Well the verse is really. From 4 down to 16.

[14 : 37] These names are so difficult. For us. It's much easier. For you and me. To say Tom, Dick and Harry. Than to say Shalumiel. The son of Zorishadai. Or Elisha. The son of Ammihud. But God has caused.

These very names. To be written here. In the Bible. For a reason. And that is. That he's honoring. These people. I know that when I'm reading. Through Bible passages. Like these at home. In my own Bible reading.

I've realized over the years. That I need to read. These names out loud. Lovingly. And without hurrying. I'm quite sure. I mispronounce. Lots of them. A Hebrew speaker.

Listening to me. Would wince. If he heard me. But if God honors them. Then surely. We should honor them too. Now let's notice. How the numbers. And the names. Are arranged.

Because the whole thing. Is set out. In a very orderly. And purposeful way. The command. To number the people. Is given to Moses. In verse two. Because he is the prophet.

[15 : 32] And the leader. Of the people. And the census. As verse three implies. Is not to be of everyone. Only of the men. Age twenty. And more. Those who are able to fight.

As soldiers. The warriors. And we'll return to that subject. In a few minutes time. Then you'll see. In verse three. That Aaron. Moses brother. Is to assist Moses. Moses.

But verse four. It's a huge job. With all these numbers. And so twelve men. The leaders. Of each of the twelve tribes. Are to assist Moses. And Aaron.

And the Lord names. Those twelve men. With those complicated names. In verses five to fifteen. So the arrangement. Is that we have. The senior leader. Of Israel. Assisted by his brother.

And assisted. By the twelve. Tribe chiefs. Now just look. At the speed. At which they move. Verse one. The Lord. Gives his command.

[16 : 27] To Moses. On the first day. Of the second month. And now look. At verse seventeen. Moses and Aaron. Took these men. Who had been named. And. On the first day.

Of the second month. They assembled. The whole congregation. Together. Who registered them. No delay. Immediate response. Moses. Is urgent. In his desire.

To obey the Lord. His head. Doesn't even hit the pillow. For one night. Before he obeys. The order from heaven. The Lord's servant. Is ready to act. At a moment's notice.

And that surely. Is an example. For us. To be quick to obey. Now let's also notice. The number twelve. Even though the actual word. Twelve.

Doesn't appear here. In the chapter. The census. Takes place. Tribe. By tribe. And you'll see. The first tribe. Mentioned. Is Reuben. In verse. Twenty. And the twelfth tribe.

[17 : 21] Is Naphtali. In verse. Forty. Two. And you'll have noticed. From verse. Forty. Seven. That the tribe of Levi. Is not included. The Levites. Had a very special role.

And we'll think about that. Next week. We'll shelve that. Till next week. But there are still. Twelve tribes. Even without the Levites. Now you'll see the reason for this.

In verses. Thirty. Two. And thirty. Four. And that is that Joseph. Who was one of the sons of Jacob. Subdivides. Into the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Who were Joseph's two sons.

Therefore grandsons of Jacob. But they received a special blessing from Jacob. At the very end of his life. And it was as though Jacob. Had adopted them as his own sons. Now numbers in the Bible.

Are never magical. But they can be symbolic. And the two most important numbers in the Bible. Are seven. Which speaks of completion.

[18 : 18] And perfection. As in the seven days of creation. Perhaps this is why the number of the beast. In the book of Revelation. Is six. Six. Six. Lacking. Lacking. Lacking.

You see what I mean. So seven speaks of completion and perfection. And twelve is the other very important number. And twelve indicates the full number. Of God's people.

So the twelve tribes of Israel. Indicate the full extent. Of God's Old Testament people. And this is why Jesus. Appointed twelve men to be his apostles.

They were to be the foundation of God's new covenant people. And this is why. At the end of the Bible. At the end of the book of Revelation. The city of the new Jerusalem is revealed. And comes down from heaven.

And John the apostle. As he looks at it. Sees that this new city. The great city has twelve gates. And each gate is inscribed with the name. Of one of the sons of Israel.

[19 : 14] And then he notices the foundations of the city walls. And on each foundation. There are twelve foundations. On each one. Is written the name of one of the twelve apostles of Jesus.

So the symbolism is unmistakable. The new Jerusalem. The city of heaven. Where all God's people live eternally with him. Has within it. All who belong to him.

From the old covenant period. And all who belong to him. From the new covenant era. Believers from before the time of Christ. And believers since the coming of Christ. The full number of God's people.

All saved of course by Christ. Because the effects of his wonderful death. Work retrospectively through history. As well as prospectively. Our God then. To come back to Numbers chapter one.

Is a God who knows his people. He knows every one of them. He's interested in each one. These figures and these lists. Are very important to him. So how can we learn from this?

[20 : 13] If it's important for him. To know his people like this. Shouldn't it also be important for us. To know his people. As well as we possibly can. After all.

Knowing God's people. Is part of caring for God's people. Let me ask. Why do we come. Why do we come to the meetings of the church. Why do we come to a meeting like this? Well we come to hear God's word.

To hear it read and taught. We come to pray. We come to praise God. To sing the truth about him in our songs. We come to encourage each other. To encourage each other. To keep going.

And to keep serving. And we come to share the happiness. Of belonging to the company. Of those who are redeemed. And forgiven. The Lord's people. Are the Lord's family.

And part of the business. Of belonging to the family. Is the importance. Of knowing each other. And not all families. Work very well. I think some families.

[21 : 08] Have. An uncle Hubert. His name may not be Hubert. But they have perhaps an uncle. Who's a miserable old grump. You can just about. Persuade him.

To come and visit you. Once a year. If you offer him Christmas dinner. And when he comes. All he does. Is sit in a corner. Reading an Agatha Christie. And speaking in monosyllables. So what uncle Hubert.

Needs to do. Is to engage properly. With his nieces. And his nephews. And to ask them. A few questions. About themselves. Come on Kirstie. What are you doing now? You're a nurse are you?

On an intensive care ward. Oh. Must be demanding. Do you like the work? Now an uncle. Who talks to his niece. Like that. Is an uncle. Who's taking membership. Of the family. Seriously.

What's your brother. Doing now Kirstie. Milking cows. Near Cumbernauld. He must smell lovely. After a day's work. Now that's the way. To be an uncle.

[22 : 02] Isn't it? So let's be like that. With the Lord's family. As well. Asking questions. Is a very encouraging. Thing to do. Now you're not being nosy. You're being supportive.

Let me suggest. A few questions. That a loving church member. Can ask of other church members. How's that rotten old knee. Of yours Fred. Is it any better.

Fred I guess is getting on in years. Isn't he. Now to a younger person. Hello. Are you new here. Have you come to Glasgow. To study. Would you like to come home. And have some lunch with us. Or how about this.

I can see you're African. Which country. Do you come from the east. Of Africa. Or the west. Which is your home country. Or. I can see that you're Iranian. What's your name.

Abdullah. Abdullah. I'm going to write that. On the back of my hand. Because I want to remember it. When I see you next week. The Lord. Knows his people. Every one of them. So let's be like him.

[23 : 00] Belonging to the church. To the Lord's family. It is the greatest privilege. That a human being. Can possibly have. Now I know. That some of us. Are shy. Than others. Some find it.

Quite hard. To take the initiative. In starting. And developing. Friendships. But it does get easier. With practice. It is always. Worth the effort. So that's the first thing.

The Lord. Knows his people. He counts his people. He knows everyone. He loves his people. Let's be like him. Now second. The Lord. Prepares his people.

For warfare. Look again. At chapter one. Verse three. 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. And that point. About those who are ready. To go to war. Is made twelve times over. Because it comes in each paragraph.

[23 : 54] Of the tribe. By tribe census. The first one. Is at the end of verse twenty. Every male. From twenty years old. And upwards. All who were. Able to go.

To war. And that phrase. Is there in every paragraph. Down to verse forty two. And it's there in the summary verse. At the end. Verse forty five. Every man able to go to war.

In Israel. All those listed. Were six hundred and three thousand. Five hundred and fifty. That is a very big army. It's about seven or eight times. As big as the British army today. That's very striking.

To have it put like this. Right at the beginning. Of the book of numbers. This is not. A typical great trek. Like the great trek. Of the Boers. Or the Mormons. To Salt Lake City.

The primary characteristic. Of this great movement. Of people. Is military. And that naturally. Makes us feel a bit. Uncomfortable. We have a horror.

[24 : 49] Of warfare. Partly because the twentieth century. Was so deeply ravaged. By horrible wars. And we're all aware. Of the misery and suffering. Caused by conflicts. In the twenty first century.

As different tribes. And nations. Go to war with each other. And shout at each other. And the Bible itself. In the prophet Isaiah. Chapter two. Holds out to us. A vision.

Of swords. Being beaten. Into plowshares. And spears. Into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up. Sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war. Anymore. Says the Lord himself.

Through the prophet Isaiah. So if the Lord's vision. Of the great future. Is of a war free earth. Why is he so insistent. In numbers chapter one.

On counting. And measuring. Israel's military muscle. Well the answer is. That war. Has to be waged. Before peace. Can be finally established.

[25 : 45] The goal of the Israelites. Was the peace. And rest. Of the promised land. You get a partial glimpse. Of that peace and rest. During the reign of Solomon. Let me read you a famous verse.

From one Kings chapter four. And Judah and Israel. Lived in safety. From Dan. Even to Beersheba. That's like from. John O'Groats to Land's End. From the top to the bottom.

They lived in safety. Every man. Under his vine. And under his fig tree. All the days of Solomon. Now that's the great goal. Peace. Rest. And plenty.

The final kingdom of the Lord. Will have nothing in it. That harms or hurts. But for peace to be established. War. First has to be waged. And won.

Now the underlying warfare. Throughout the Bible. Is the warfare. Between the Lord and Satan. Remember how the Lord. Says to Satan. In Genesis chapter three. I will put enmity. Between you and the woman.

[26 : 42] And between your offspring. And her offspring. Notice those words. I will put enmity. It's the Lord. Who causes. The warfare. Who wages war. And he causes.

The spiritual warfare. Because only by waging the war. And winning the war. Can peace be established. And we see different phases. Of this holy warfare. In different parts.

Of the Bible story. These military men. Of Israel. In Numbers chapter one. Have to be able to fight. Because. Various kings. And nations. Are going to oppose them.

And stand in their way. Before they can reach Canaan. The promised land. And when they do finally. Reach the promised land. They're going to have to fight on. They're going to have to fight. The indigenous Canaanites.

In order to expel them. Come from the promised land. And their expulsion. Of those Canaanite nations. Will be righteous. And God ordained. Because. The Israelites.

[27 : 36] Will be the instruments. Of God's righteous judgment. Against the Canaanites. It's not just an exercise. In land grabbing. Or ethnic cleansing. The Old Testament.

Is absolutely clear. That the Canaanites. Are ripe for God's judgment. Because of their abominable. Cultural practices. Child sacrifice. And so on. But the warfare. Has to be waged.

Before the peaceful settlement. Can be enjoyed. Now the military era. Of God's people. As physically armed warriors. That era was of course.

Temporary. And limited in scope. Christian people today. We're not armed. With sword. And spear. And Kalashnikov. Not at all. But the New Testament. Teaches us.

That we are to be. The Lord's fighting force. In a different way. Just think of the arrival. Of Jesus. He came as the prince of peace. But he could only establish peace.

[28 : 33] In a real and eternal sense. For his people. By waging war. Against the devil. And by winning that war. As John the apostle. Puts it in his first letter. 1 John chapter 3 verse 8.

The reason the son of God appeared. Isn't that a good way. To start a verse. The reason the son of God appeared. Was to destroy. The works.

Of the devil. So the creator. Becomes the destroyer. He has to. Otherwise. There can be no eternal peace. For his people. The cross was the place.

Where Jesus decisively. Defeated the devil. The prince of peace. Therefore. Is a warrior. And thank God. That he is the invincible warrior. In the song of Moses and Miriam.

In Exodus chapter 15. Just after they've crossed the Red Sea. There is this line. The Lord. Is a man of war. The Lord. Is his name. Isn't that a striking phrase.

[29 : 31] The Lord. Is a man of war. So friends. Let's never be embarrassed. At the idea. That the Lord's people. Are a fighting force. Our weapons. Are not swords and guns.

But the gospel. The powerful arguments. And reasoning. Of the gospel. I think of it. If you're a Christian. When you became a Christian. What happened? You listened.

You heard the gospel. And as you heard it. You were persuaded by it. To abandon the devil's lies. And to embrace the truth about God. And as our life as Christians develops.

We see more and more clearly. How empty and pathetic. Are the lies of the devil. The values of the godless world. The things that our friends. Who are not Christians live for. What are they?

They're will of the wisps. They're nothings. Vanity and lies. So let me ask. Are you willing to think of yourself. As a soldier. In Christ's army.

[30 : 26] Are we willing. As a church. To think of ourselves. As a unit. In the great battalion. Under our commander in chief. Let's not be squeamish about it. We are engaged.

In the great warfare. I remember when I first went off. To a scripture union camp. As a teenager. The camp leader. Was called the commandant. And he asked us boys.

To call him. To address him as. Commie. His right hand man. Was called the adjutant. We had to call him. Adj. And the leaders. Were called. Officers.

Christian youth organizations. Going back. A generation or two. They often wore uniform. And had titles like. Campaigners. And crusaders. And church lads brigade. Now we've moved.

Very much away. From that. Overtly military style. These days. And there are perhaps. Good reasons. For changing the trimmings. But we mustn't lose. The underlying reality. The Lord Jesus.

[31 : 23] Is our commander. He has dealt the devil. A fatal wound. And the final victory. Is secured. But in the meantime. The fatally wounded serpent. Is still filling the world.

With his lies. And our task. Is to oppose them. With the truth. Of the gospel. We do it graciously. We do it lovingly. But we must do it firmly. And prayerfully. Now thirdly.

And this is a great comfort. To the Lord's soldiers. Numbers chapter 2. Shows us. That the Lord. Journeys with his people. As they set out.

Towards the promised land. And engage in warfare. Let's look at chapter 2. Verse 1. The Lord spoke to Moses. And Aaron saying. Now chapter 1 verse 1.

The Lord speaks to Moses. But here in chapter 2. Things are centered. On the positioning. Of the tent of meeting. The tabernacle. Which is Aaron's responsibility. Because he's the high priest. And chapter 2.

[32 : 22] Sets out in words. How the camp of Israel. Is to be physically arranged. Chapter 2. Describes the camp site. And it's very different. From going to a campsite.

At Pitlochri. For the weekend. With 20 or 30 tents. Spread out. Higgledy-piggledy. Across a field. We have here. An enormous number of people. Over 600,000 fighting men.

And then there are all the women. And children. And teenagers as well. Verse 2. Gives the basic instruction. The people of Israel. Shall camp. Each by his own standard.

That's his flag. With the banners. Of their father's houses. They shall camp. Facing the tent of meeting. On every side. So the tabernacle.

That's the portable tent. Looked after by the Levites. The tabernacle. Is to be pitched. In the very center. Of the campsite. And just try and imagine that. It's a huge campsite.

[33 : 18] With all these people. But stand with me. Stand beside me. If you will. In your imagination. Beside the tabernacle. Right in the middle. Which represents. The very presence of God. Can you picture the vastness.

Of the wilderness of Sinai. Stretching out on all sides. Can you smell the smell of the dust. Can you hear the Middle Eastern ravens. Croaking overhead. Can you hear the elderly people.

Coughing in their tents. Now look eastwards. Verse 3. Encamped on the eastward side. Are the three tribes. Of Judah.

Issachar. And Zebulun. Then turn to the south. In verse 10. And there you see. Reuben. And Simeon. And Gad. Then look west. In verse 18. And you see the tents.

Of Ephraim. Manasseh. And Benjamin. And then turn northwards. In verse 25. And you see the tribes. Of Dan. Asher. And Naphtali. But those hundreds.

[34 : 13] Of thousands. Of tents. Are not just pitched. Haphazardly. Facing every which way. Look back to verse 2. Every tent. Is to be pitched. With its front flaps.

Facing. The tabernacle. So when little Johnny Naphtali. Age 7. Gets up in the morning. And steps outside the tent. His mother calls to him from inside.

What's the weather like Johnny? Warm. He says as usual. What can you see Johnny? I see a tent mother. It's a beautiful tent. And what does that tent mean Johnny? It means mother.

That the Lord. Is in the midst of our camp. That's my boy. Now go and wash your face. You see she's teaching him there. To know the Lord.

Verse 2. They shall camp. Facing the tent of meeting. On every side. It's a powerful visual aid. The Lord is setting it out like this. So that the people.

[35 : 10] Are being constantly reminded. That he is there. With them. In their midst. And verse 17. Really. I didn't read it out earlier. But verse 17. Is the centerpiece.

Of the whole chapter. 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. In other words. Whether the people. Are moving. And marching. Or camping. And resting. The presence of the Lord.

Is visually. Tangible. In their midst. Now we. The church of Christ. Today. We need no physical tent. To look at. We're in a far better position.

Than the ancient Israelites. John the evangelist. At the beginning of his gospel. Writes this. The word. Became flesh. And. Tabernacled.

[36 : 04] Amongst us. Jesus. Is the tabernacle. Who has superseded. The Old Testament tabernacle. The tabernacle. Which eventually. Became the temple. He's the new temple.

He has come. Into our midst. And although his physical. Human body. Has been withdrawn. From our sight. He dwells with us. In the person. Of his Holy Spirit. His other self.

And we ourselves. The church of Christ. Become the temple. As Paul puts it. In Ephesians chapter 2. Christ Jesus himself. Is the cornerstone. In whom the whole structure.

Grows into a holy temple. In the Lord. In him. You also. You Ephesians. Are being built together. Into a dwelling place. For God. By the Spirit.

So we. Who are the church of Christ. We are now. The dwelling place. Of God. The tabernacle. In Numbers chapter 2. Represented. The dwelling of God.

[36 : 59] With his people. But now. Since the outpouring. Of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost. Every Christian. Is the dwelling place. Of God. And every congregation. Of Christ's people.

Is his residence. The Lord. Was with the Israelites. As they marched. And as they went to war. And when they camped. And rested. And slept. He was with them.

And he's with us. As we serve him. And proclaim the good news. About him. And bring our lives. Under his wholesome. And kindly discipline. So far then.

The God of Numbers 1 and 2. Is a God who knows. And numbers his people. A God who prepares his people. For warfare. And a God who journeys. With his people. On the march.

And lastly. Fourthly. He is a God. Who expects. His people's. Obedience. Just look at the last verse. Of chapter 1. 1.

[37 : 54] 54. Thus. Did. The people of Israel. They did. According to. All that the Lord. Commanded Moses. Then look at chapter 2.

Verse. 33. But the Levites. Were not listed. Among the people of Israel. As the Lord. Commanded Moses.

And verse 34. Thus did. The people of Israel. According to all. That the Lord. Commanded Moses. so they camped by their standards, etc. As the Lord commanded Moses.

That's one of the great refrains of the first five books of the Bible. Now Moses, you know, is the human author of these five books. But he doesn't write these phrases about his own obedience to the Lord.

He doesn't write those in order to enhance his legacy. He's not like a modern prime minister or president who's concerned to be well thought of in the future. He's not saying, haven't I done well?

[38 : 52] I've done everything that the Lord commanded me to do. No, his concern is not with his reputation. What he's concerned about is that the people should learn that obedience is God's concern.

So whenever Moses writes a phrase like that, he's wanting to be provocative. He's wanting his readers to pause and to think, ah, yes, to do as God commands is at the very heart of being a faithful member of the people of God.

Think of the central message of Moses' final sermons in the book of Deuteronomy. Obedience brings blessing. Disobedience brings disaster. Therefore, obey the Lord, O Israel.

To obey is life and blessing. Just look again at the first sentence of chapter 2, verse 34. Thus did the people of Israel.

And look at the phrase immediately before it, as the Lord commanded Israel. And then look at the phrase immediately afterwards, according to all that the Lord commanded Moses.

[39 : 58] What a blessing that the people of Israel were obedient at that point. Now, alas, there was plenty of disobedience to follow. But at this point, as they set out from Sinai, they were doing as the Lord commanded Moses.

Obedience, it's always the way of safety and joy, whereas disobedience in the end can only bring downfall and ruin. What marks these opening chapters of Numbers is a sense of discipline and good order and purpose.

The warriors are counted. The camp is arranged. The Lord is traveling in their midst. And the people are obedient. It's a very attractive picture. And it has a lot to say to the Church of Christ.

Think of our world today, because today we live in a society which is marked by quite the opposite qualities. Lives of disorder are all around us. Many people feel that moral anarchy and a life driven only by king self is the way to live a happy and useful life.

But we weren't made for anarchy. We need God as our king and Jesus as our commanding officer. We need the fellowship of the church and we need the rich teaching of the Bible.

[41 : 12] We need the sense of purpose that comes from being soldiers of the warrior king, the king whose gospel defeats the lies and deceitfulness of our enemy.

If we are Christian people, the Church of Christ, the Lord is in our midst, his weapon is in our hand, and our destination is the glorious kingdom beyond this world where Christ reigns.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for raising up Moses to lead your people and for teaching him how to record these momentous and foundational events in the first five books of the Bible.

We thank you for this Torah, this basic and wonderful instruction that you give to us. And we pray that you'll fill our hearts with an increasing hunger for it, that we should live our life this way in the way that Moses teaches and discover the joy and life and blessing of your kind care.

And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 35] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.