

Portion Bamidbar Numbers - Bamidbar (1-4.2)

God gives the Israelites many laws. God promises to be good to the Israelites if they listen to God and follow God's ways. God tells the Israelites that they will suffer bad consequences if they do not listen to God and follow God's ways.

At the beginning of the 2nd year of being free from slavery God spoke to Moses in the Tent of Appointed Meeting. God said "Count all the Israelites by tribe. Count only males who are 20 years old or more." So Moses and Aaron counted the Israelites according to their tribe: the sons of Reuben, 46,500. Sons of Shimeon, 59,300. Sons of Gad, 45,650. Sons of Yehuda, 74,600. Sons of Yissakhar, 54,400. Sons of Zebulun, 57,400. Sons of Ephraim, 40,500. Sons of Menashe, 32,200. Sons of Benjamin 35,400. Sons of Dan, 62,700. Sons of Asher, 41,500. Sons of Naphtali, 53,400. A total of 603,550 were counted.

"The Levites," God said, "shall not be counted. They shall be given to Aaron, the High Priest, and his priestly sons to take care of the Dwelling Place of the Ten Commandments and all that belongs to the Tent of Appointed Meeting. They shall carry the Dwelling Place when traveling and pitch their tents around it. Moses and Aaron and his sons shall camp in front of the Tent while all the other Israelites shall camp by tribe at a distance from it."

God continued, "The Levites shall be considered firstborn to Me. On the day I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I made the firstborn, from man to beast, holy. Each firstborn is Mine. The sons of Levi, one month old and up, are then counted to a total 22,000. The firstborn Levites are also counted. For each firstborn five shekels must be given to Aaron and his sons."

"Among the Levites," God commanded Moses and Aaron, "The Kohathites must perform special duties in the Tent of Meeting. They shall take care of the Tent's most sacred objects. When it is time for the Hebrews to move the priests shall take down the screen curtain and cover all the sacred objects and the Ark of the Pact. Only the Kohathites shall come and lift these covers. Each Kohathite will have a specific duty so that each Kohathite shall not die when they approach the most sacred objects. Aaron's son, Eleazer, shall make sure that the Tabernacle has all it needs for the holy rituals including the lighting oil, the sweet smelling spices, the regular meal offering and the anointing oil.

Questions: 1. Does it still make sense for only men to be counted among the Israelites and to perform sacred tasks? Why or why not? 2. Like the Kohathites, why is it helpful for each person to have specific responsibilities? 3) Is there anything special about the firstborn today? What and why?

Illustration Ideas: The Hebrews being counted....The Levites camping around the Dwelling Place for The Ten Commandments...the Kohathites taking care of the Dwelling Place's most sacred objects.

