

Numbers 1:5-19

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-1/numbers-15-19/>

God names a man from each tribe to be appointed to help Moses and Aaron carry out the census.

Verses 5–15 list *the names of the men who shall stand with you* [Moses] while conducting the census.

–*Of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur.* The name “Elizur” means “my God is a rock.” *Reuben* was Jacob’s firstborn son, from his wife Leah, so is the first tribe listed.

–*Of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.* The name “Shelumiel” means “friend of God.” *Simeon* was Jacob’s second son, also from Leah.

–*Of Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab.* The name “Nahshon” means “enchanter.” *Judah* was Jacob’s third son, also from Leah. Levi was the fourth son, from Leah, but is not listed, as the Levites were apparently exempt from military service.

–*Of Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar.* The name “Nethanel” means “given to God.” *Issachar* was Jacob’s fifth son born to his wife Leah.

–*Of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon.* The name “Eliab” means “my God is father.” *Zebulun* was Jacob’s sixth son born to his wife Leah.

–*Of the sons of Joseph: of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud.* The name “Elishama” means “my God has heard.” Ephraim was the second son of Joseph (Genesis 41:52). *Joseph* was Jacob’s first son born to his wife Rachel.

–*Of Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.* The name “Gamaliel” means “my reward is God.” Manasseh was the first son of Joseph (Genesis 41:51).

–*Of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni.* The name “Abidan” means “my father is judge.” *Benjamin* was Jacob’s second son born to his wife Rachel.

–*Of Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.* The name “Ahiezer” means “my brother is help.” *Dan* was Jacob’s fifthborn son, but was born to Bilhah, the handmaid of Rachel. He was the first son born of a handmaiden.

–*Of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran.* The name “Pagiel” means “my God is a rock.” *Asher* was the second son born to Jacob from Leah’s handmaiden Zilpah.

–*Of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel.* The name “Eliasaph” means “God has added.” *Gad* was the first son born to Jacob from Leah’s handmaiden Zilpah.

–*Of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan.* The name “Ahira” means “my brother is evil”. *Naphtali* was the second son born to Jacob from Rachel’s handmaiden Bilhah (Genesis 29:31-30).

Verse 16 is in the form of a legal statement. This verse made it official that *these are they who were called of the congregation, the leaders of their fathers’ tribes*. These *leaders* (or “ones lifted up”) *were the heads of divisions of Israel*. This would make them, in a sense, a captain or general.

After the men were named and placed in leadership roles over the tribes, they had to be confirmed in front of the people. So, *Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by name, then they assembled all the congregation together on the first of the second month*. The *second month* is according to the calendar established by God, in which the first month began based on the Passover (Exodus 12:2).

To verify their qualifications to lead their respective tribes, Moses and Aaron had them *registered by ancestry in their families, by their fathers’ households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, head by head* (v. 18). It is likely that this knowledge was held in oral tradition, and now was being committed to writing.

This was in accordance with what *the Lord had commanded Moses*. This phrase was used many times in Exodus to state that Moses and the people obeyed the LORD’s command, especially in the construction of the tabernacle (See Exodus 35 – 40). It will also be used frequently in Numbers. It was the LORD who was preparing them for battle. In Exodus, God stated:

“Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, “The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.”
(Exodus 31:17)

This indicates that God knew that Israel was not prepared to see and wage war when they first left Egypt. God waited until they were ready to give them a test, and led them to prevail (Exodus 17).

The result of Moses’ obedience here was that *he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai*. The leaders of Israel now have a census of military troops, they know where their soldiers are located, and they have a command structure established.

Biblical Text

⁵ These then are the names of the men who shall stand with you: of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur;⁶ of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai;⁷ of Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab;⁸ of Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar;⁹ of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon;¹⁰ of the sons of Joseph: of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; of Manasseh, Gamaliel

the son of Pedahzur;¹¹ of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni;¹² of Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai;¹³ of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran;¹⁴ of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel;¹⁵ of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan.¹⁶ These are they who were called of the congregation, the leaders of their fathers' tribes; they were the heads of divisions of Israel."

¹⁷ So Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by name,¹⁸ and they assembled all the congregation together on the first of the second month. Then they registered by ancestry in their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, head by head,¹⁹ just as the Lord had commanded Moses. So he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai.