

Numbers 3:14-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-3/numbers-314-20/>

The next set of instructions from the LORD involved numbering and placing the Levites. The numbers were to be by household and family. They were to count the number of males one month old and older. The numbers were to be by each family in the three sons of Levi and their descendants.

Again, *the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai*. He told Moses to *number the sons of Levi by their fathers' households, by their families*, and he was to count *every male from a month old and upward*. This was different from how he numbered the males in the other tribes. Moses counted the Levite males "a month old and upward," whereas with the other tribes he counted "twenty years old and above" (Numbers 1:20). The difference was that males counted in the other tribes were limited to those twenty and older, because only those twenty and older were eligible to serve in the military. Here, the Levites were numbered according to the total number of males older than one month of age. So, in obedience, *Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord, just as he had been commanded*.

The Levites were descended from *the sons of Levi* and were numbered *by their names*, which were *Gershon and Kohath and Merari* (Genesis 46:11; Exodus 6:16). Thus, the divisions within the tribe of Levi were ordered and organized according to Levi's three sons, and were numbered accordingly. Moses then named the descendants of each son of Levi. First, he lists the *names of the sons of Gershon*, Levi's firstborn, *by their families* (v. 18), which were *Libni and Shimei* (Exodus 6:17). Next, *the sons of Kohath*, Levi's second born, were counted *by their families*, which were *Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel*. Amram was the father of Moses, Aaron, and their older sister Miriam (Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59; I Chron. 6:3). Then, *the sons of Merari* were numbered *by their families*, whose names were *Mahli and Mushi*.

So, the census would be taken based on *the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households*. No reason is given here for the method of numbering the Levites other than it was what the LORD commanded.

Biblical Text

¹⁴ Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying, ¹⁵ "Number the sons of Levi by their fathers' households, by their families; every male from a month old and upward you shall number." ¹⁶ So Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord, just as he had been commanded. ¹⁷ These then are the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari. ¹⁸ These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei; ¹⁹ and the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel; ²⁰ and the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households.