

Robert Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Lecture 5B

Leviticus and Numbers

6. The Tabernacle is Set Up – Exodus 40

Before we move on, I missed one bullet point on slide 32, that statement, “Typology is an effort to understand the unity of the Bible from the standpoint of history rather than allegory.” Remember that diagram that I had on the line of development of the redemptive history, and the same truth reappearing at various points along that line tying history together.

The next heading is 6, “The tabernacle is set up – Exodus 40.” Remember we talked about the basic structure of the book way back in the beginning of our discussion as Liberation or Exodus, Mount Sinai, and then Tabernacle – the three movements in the book of Exodus. It’s in chapter 40 that we reach the climax. You read in chapter 40 verse 17, “So that tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year.” Then in verse 20, “He took the Testimony and placed it in the ark.” The testimony is the Ten Commandments, those tablets of stone. “Then he brought the ark into the tabernacle and hung the shielding curtain and shielded the ark of the Testimony as the Lord had commanded him.” And you read in verse 34, “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

When we look at the instructions for the building of the tabernacle, there is a citation from J. A. Motyer on page 31, 32 of the citations. He says, “This is the climax.” Remember he says, “God came to dwell in the Tent. God was taking up residence in the midst of his people. This is the climax of the progress of redemption in the book of Exodus.”

7. The Book of Leviticus

a. Name

With those comments then we move on to number 7 on your outline, “The

Book of Leviticus.” We’re not going to spend a great deal of time on Leviticus, mostly because it’s legal material. Notice the two sub-points under 7: a is the “Name,” b is “General comments on the content.” As far as the name is concerned, remember I said that in Jewish tradition, the name is taken from the first words of the first line of the book. That happens to be “weyiqra” in Leviticus 1:1, “and he called.” So in the Jewish tradition, the title is “and he called,” (*weyiqra*). The title we are familiar with, Leviticus, comes from the Latin Vulgate. You can see the Latin form in the word, “Leviticus.” It really means “a Levitical book,” a book that concerns the work of the Levites, especially the priests, and their duties. I think we’re better off having that Vulgate title which says something about the content of the book than the title in the Jewish tradition, because Leviticus thus reflects the emphasis of the book on ritual, duties of priests, duties of Levites, types of sacrifices, festivals, etc.

b. General Comments on Contents

Point b, “General comments on contents.” The book is mainly ritual legislation. The historical framework for that is still Israel at Mount Sinai. You notice how the first verse begins with “The Lord called Moses from the Tent of Meeting.” So at Sinai Israel is being equipped for the purpose for which the Lord had made them a nation. That purpose is given in Exodus 19:6, where the Lord said, “You will be for me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.” Israel is to be set apart from all other nations. Then Israel is to perform a priestly task among the nations – a mediatorial function. God had already given Israel a number of legal sections of legal material. You have first the foundational law, the Ten Commandments, then you have the Book of the Covenant, Exodus 20 to 23. Then he went back up on the mountain where he was for 40 days. Then you’ve got all that regulation concerning construction of the tabernacle, Exodus 27 to 31 and 36 to 40. At the end of Exodus the tabernacle is set up, and now in Leviticus, you have additional, detailed instructions describing how a sinful people can approach

a holy God, and be assured of acceptance. That's I think the basic thrust of the book: how sinful people can approach a holy God and be assured of acceptance.

1) Key Verse: Lev. 17:11 – Substitutionary Atonement

The key verse of Leviticus is chapter 17 verse 11, which says, "For the life of a creature is in the blood. I'm giving this to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." So the fundamental idea of the book is substitutionary atonement that is provided by means of blood sacrifice. Another important feature of the book is that it regulates the duties of priests. Priests are necessary intermediaries between the Lord and his people. The character of the book comes to life in Leviticus 20:26, where you read, "You are to be holy to me, because I the Lord am holy. And I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." So it's a book about the holiness of the Lord. The Lord is holy and he wants his people to be holy; his people are to be set apart from all other people.

2) Types of Laws

We can look at the types of law. I'm going to just briefly point out 5 different categories of material. First, you have circumstances under which the sinner can and should bring a sacrifice. Secondly, you have the kinds of sacrifices he should bring and instructions concerning how they are to be offered. Thirdly, qualifications and duties of priests are described; and fourthly, detailed laws concerning sexual chastity are given. That teaching should be set against the background of Canaanite practices in the area of sexuality. You find that especially in Leviticus chapter 18 and chapter 20, where you have the detailed descriptions of the things forbidden to the Israelites that are said to be an abomination to the Lord. Don't do as the Canaanites do. Then fifthly, laws concerning ritual cleanness and uncleanness. Such as, no contact with dead bodies, leprosy, animals, etc.

So it's those types of things that you find legislated in the book of Leviticus. It's a book of an enormous significance for the ancient Israelite, because it dealt with things that the Israelites faced every day of their lives. In other words, if they went about their daily business, they would be confronted with the kinds of issues that are spoken to in these laws. Now for us, I think the book takes on a quite different significance, because we do not live under the Old Testament economy. These ritual laws are again of typological significance, pointing forward to Christ and find completion and fulfillment in Christ. The book of Hebrews says, "The sacrifice of bulls and goats ultimately could not take away sin." It was only by the sacrifice of Christ that that would be accomplished when Christ came. He was the final sacrifice. All that has been prefigured and foreshadowed in these Old Testament rituals that were fulfilled in Christ. These regulations then are no longer binding on a day to day basis in the new covenant. So for us, I think the meaning takes on quite a different shape than it did for the ancient Israelite. I think first of all you see in these laws the background for understanding references to sacrificial offering, ceremonies of purification, institutions such as the Sabbatical year, year of Jubilee, in the rest of the Bible; some of that in the Old Testament, some of that in the New Testament. So if you want to understand those kinds of references, you find that the descriptions of such things are in the book of Leviticus.

Secondly, you see Christ in a typical way in the Old Testament. All these rituals point forward to Christ. It's a book of atonement, sanctification and consecration, and has significance.

Thirdly, it's of interest from the viewpoint of the general history of religions, where you can compare the worship of Israel with that of other ancient peoples. That's more of a historical thing than theological. How did Israel worship? How did Canaanites worship? That's looking at it from the history of religion standpoint. Leviticus gives much of the information about how the Israel worshipped in the Old Testament period.

Lastly, as far as orthodox Jews are concerned, there you have a meaning

somewhat similar to what it was in the Old Testament, whether it was temple daily sacrifices, much of it is concerned with dietary laws and the Sabbath. One commentator noted, when asked what book in the Pentateuch they like to study most, people of non-Jewish background would pick Genesis; whereas most Orthodox Jews would probably say Leviticus, because in Leviticus there's always material that governs their life still today.

8. Laws Regarding Sacrifice – Leviticus 1-7

9. Consecration of Priests – Leviticus 8-9

10. The Rebellion of Nadab and Abihu – Leviticus 10

Other than those general comments, notice on your outline number 8, “Laws regarding sacrifice – Leviticus 1-7,” I’m not going to look at that material, but that’s where you get more information on sacrifice. Number 9, “Consecration of Priests – Leviticus 8-9.” I’m not going to comment on that either. But 10, “The rebellion of Nadab and Abihu – Leviticus 10,” I do want to make a couple comments. Leviticus 10 is historical. It’s the rebellion of Nadab and Abihu, and the way which the Lord deals with that. This is one of the few narrative sections in the book. And you read in the first verse, “Aaron’s, sons of Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered an unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Moses then said to Aaron, ‘This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: “Among those who approach me I will show myself holy, in the sight of all people I will be honored.”’” Aaron remained silent. Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, ‘Come here; carry your cousins outside the camp, away from the front of the sanctuary.’ So they came and carried them, still in their tunics, outside the camp as Moses ordered. Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes or you will die and the Lord will be angry with the whole

community.” Down in verse 8, “Then the Lord said to Aaron, ‘You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.’”

So here is the story of Nadab and Abihu who offered what is described here as unauthorized fire before the Lord. Exactly what that is, is not further described. It is difficult to know exactly what the offense was. Some suggest that the coals that were put in their censers were not taken from the altar of Burnt Offering. If you go up to the last verses of chapter 9, you read in connection with the setting apart of the priests by Moses and Aaron, in verse 24, “The Lord appeared to all the people; fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions of the altar.” In other words, that altar, at the end of the preceding chapter, had been lit by the divine fire, so to speak, that came from the Lord. Did Nadab and Abihu take some other source of coals rather than from the altar of burnt offering? If you go to Leviticus 16, where you have the discussion of the Day of Atonement, and look at verse 12, it says there, “Aaron is to take the sense of burning coals from the altar from before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground incense.” So it may have been the source of the fire.

Others think it has to do with the incense. It says they added incense, and then go back to Exodus 30:34-38, the instructions for the making of the incense. So perhaps they didn’t follow the instructions for that. But whatever it was, there was some either careless or deliberate breaking of prescribed regulations, and because of that Nadab and Abihu were stricken by the fire.

Some also suggest there may have been drunkenness involved, because of that statement down in verses 8 and 9, “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting or you will die.” Were Nadab and Abihu intoxicated? Was getting drunk the issue? But whatever it was, it was a severe penalty.

This may be making an example out of Nadab and Abihu in the beginning of the ritual of observance of Israel. That beginning is important so that the

worship was established on a proper foundation, and an example made so that the regulations would be followed. I think there is some parallel here in what happens to Nadab and Abihu with what happens to Ananias and Saphira in Acts chapter 5. They misrepresented the offering they brought and they were stricken and carried out. Certainly other people subsequent did things as bad or worse than either Ananias and Saphira or Nadab and Abihu, and yet they did not pay for that with their lives as these people did. But the Lord is again underlining in a clear and forceful manner the importance of following the regulations; Israel is beginning her existence as God's covenant people. So that's a few comments on 10, "The Rebellion of Nadab and Abihu."

11. Other Laws – Leviticus 11-27

Number 11 is sort of just a catch-all, "Other laws – Leviticus 11-27." You notice the festivals, including the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16; and all that legal material, certainly chapter 16 is an important chapter, where annually you have this observance of the Day of Atonement. And on that day the high priest made atonement for himself, and his household, and for the whole community of Israel. And it was an important day on the annual calendar.

Besides chapter 16, you might add there chapter 23, because in 23, you have reference to the three major annual festivals that were to be observed. You notice in Leviticus 23:4-8, there's discussion of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Verse 6, "On the fifteenth day of the month, the Lord's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins." Verse 7, the first day was a solemn assembly, and verse 5, the Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the month and the fifteenth day of the month is the feast of Unleavened Bread. So the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread are in verses 4 to 8.

Then in Leviticus 23:15-22 is the Feast of Weeks. In the New Testament that is referred to as Pentecost. So, "From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty

days [that's where you get the title "Pentecost" or 50] up to the day after the seventh Sabbath," and the description of that Feast of Weeks. Then in Leviticus 23:33-43 is the Feast of Tabernacles. It comes right after the Day of Atonement. So those three festivals, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles were annual festivals which became very important in the life of Israel.

12. Preparation for Leaving Sinai – Number 1:1-10:10

a. The Book of Numbers

1) Name

That brings us to 12, "Preparation for Leaving Sinai – Numbers 1:1-10:10." Letter a is, "The book of Numbers." And again, under that there are two sub-points, 1), "Name," and 2), "Content."

First, as far as the name is concerned, in Hebrew tradition, the name is *bemidbar*, which means "in the wilderness." It comes from the first verse, "The Lord spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai." In the desert, is *bemidbar*. It's the fifth word, in this case, in the Hebrew text. The English name, "Numbers," comes from the Septuagint, the Greek *Arithmoi*, and then is passed down into our English tradition. The translation for *Arithmoi* is "Numbers." Now, in this case, I think it's unfortunate that the title of the book's not from the Hebrew tradition, "in the wilderness," because "in the wilderness" describes more about the content of the book than does the title, "Numbers." When you read the title "Numbers," and then you start the first chapter, and you have all these censuses to the fourth chapter. Then in chapter 26, at the end of the book, you have another chapter of census taking. But that's only five chapters. As far as percent of the book, 90 percent of the book has nothing to do with numbers or the census. So I think that the title "in the wilderness" would probably help people, encouraging them to read the book, much more than the title that we're familiar with.

2) Content of Numbers

a) Chronology

As far as the content is concerned, I think the way to get a handle on the content is to look at the chronological structure of the book. The book covers a period of 38 years. Israel was two years at Sinai, and then 38 years in the wilderness. We find that from comparing Numbers 1:1 with Deuteronomy 1:3. You look at Numbers 1:1, where it says, “The Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.” First day, second month, second year. And you look at Deuteronomy 1:3 and you read, “In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all the Lord had commanded him.” So the book of Numbers is a 38-year period.

The Israelites were in the camp at Mount Sinai for about 2 years. You get that from Exodus 19:1 that says, “In the third month after Israel left Egypt, they arrived at Sinai.” Then Numbers 10:11, “On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the testimony,” and that’s where Israel sets out leaving Mount Sinai. So they were at Sinai from the third month after the Exodus, to the twentieth day of the second month, the second year after the exodus. So you see what that means is Numbers 1:1 to 10:10 covers a period of 19 days. In other words, Numbers 1:1, if you go back to that preceding text there in 1:1, the first day of the second month of the second year; Numbers 10:11: twentieth day of the second month of the second year. Numbers 1:1 to 10:11 was those last 19 days that Israel remained at Mount Sinai. That’s basically the first ten chapters, the census, and for part of that they were organizing themselves to leave Sinai.

They leave Sinai, the next significant event is described in Numbers 13:14, where they arrive at Kadesh Barnea, which is the very southern entrance, you might say, into the land of Canaan. There they send spies out into the land of Canaan, from Kadesh Barnea. The spies come back and the majority of them,

except Caleb and Joshua, said, “There’s no way we can do it. These people are too powerful for us.” And the Lord was angry with them and therefore he said, “This generation who does not have faith and does not trust me to bring you into the land of Canaan will die in the wilderness.” The generation under 20 years of age, will grow up and they will ultimately be the ones who enter the land of Canaan.

So Numbers 13 and 14 are the next significant events, until you get to Numbers 15 to 20, which is the 38 years of wandering. In other words, only six chapters of it tell about that 38-year period. This is a pretty condensed description of that long period of time. How do we know that chapter 20 is the end of that period of wandering? Because it appears that Numbers 20:1 through 36:13 is the last year before the fortieth year after the Exodus. What’s the basis for that? Look at Numbers 20:1. We read, “In the first month, the whole Israelite community arrived at the desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.” Now, the problem with Numbers 20:1 is, it says “in the first month,” but doesn’t say what year. We’re going to come back to that in a minute. In the first month, they arrived at the desert of Zin and stayed at Kadesh, Miriam dies and is buried. If you go down further in chapter 20, you read in verse 22 and following about the death of Aaron. You see, they arrive, they stayed at Kadesh, verse 22 says, “The whole Israelite community set out from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. At Mount Hor near the border of Edom, the Lord says to Moses and Aaron, ‘Aaron will be gathered to his people, he will not enter the land I’ll give to the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meriba.’” You read in verse 28, “Aaron died there, on the top of the mountain.

Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died the entire house of Israel mourned for him thirty days.” So if you go from Numbers 20:1-29 where Aaron dies, to Numbers 33:36 and following, Numbers 33 is a chapter that is a listing of all the places where Israel stopped as they wandered through the wilderness. And when you get to verse 36 in that list, you read, “They left Ezion Geber, camped at

Kadesh in the desert of Zin.” Now compare Numbers 33:36 with 20:1. “In the first month, the whole community of Israel arrived at the desert of Zin. They stayed at Kadesh.” See, there’s the desert of Zin and Kadesh. And then in verse 37, you read that, “They left Kadesh, and came to Mount Hor.” That is the same as 20:22, “The whole Israel community set out from Kadesh, came to Mount Hor;” and it’s at Mount Hor where Aaron died. So you read in chapter 33 verse 37, “They left Kadesh, came to Mount Hor, at the border of Edom.

At the Lord’s command, Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor where he died,” and then a date, “on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year, after the Israelites came out of Egypt.” So that indicates that chapter 20 begins in the fortieth year. See you go back to chapter 20, verse 1, “In the first month, they come to the desert of Zin.” First month of what year? Was that the fortieth year? Because that’s where Miriam died, and where Aaron died. So it seems clear, then, that from 20:1 to 36:13 you have material pertaining to that last year; the fortieth year. So I think that helps, if you trace this chronology, it gives you a structure for the book. Chapters 15 to 20 is really the bulk of that 38-year period. First 10 chapters Israel is in Sinai. And 13 to 14 they’re at Kadesh; and 15 to 20 is the wilderness wandering of 38 years, and after that, focus is on the fortieth year as they position themselves to enter the promise land.

b. The Men of War Are Numbered and Positions Assigned – Num. 1:1 to 2:24

Let’s go on to b, “The men of war are numbered and positions assigned – 1:1 to 2:24.” The Lord told Moses to take an inventory, and that involved counting all the males 20 years old and older who were able to go out and fight. You read that in Numbers 1:2 and 3, where the Lord says, “Take a census of the whole Israel community by their clan and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to number by their divisions, all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army.” The rest of chapter 1 describes how many such fighting men there were in each of the tribes.

1) Census Numbers

When you get down to chapter 1 verse 46 you get a total, where the number from each tribe is added up, and you read that the total number was 603,550. A similar census is taken at the end of the book, in chapter 26, and if you look there, at verse 51, the total number there was 601,730. So it is almost the same but a few less. But over that 38-year period, one whole generation died, another generation had taken their place. 600,000 is a round number of fighting men age 20 or above.

Now, if you extrapolate from that, if there are 600,000 men age 20 or above, you have males who are less than 20, and you also have females. So the total population of Israel at the time of the Exodus, you would multiply that 600,000 by three, probably. So if you're multiplying by three, you're talking of a total population of 1,800,000, almost 2 million people. Usually the round numbers given for the population of Israel are 2 to 3 million people. And that high number of people has raised a lot of questions, and not only by people who do not view the scripture as inspired and a trustworthy account of this history of this time.

Some of the questions arise out of the text of the Old Testament itself with respect to how many Israelites there were. For example, Deuteronomy says over and over again something to this effect. Look at Deuteronomy chapter 7 the first verse, "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess, and drives out before you, many nations: the Hittites, Girgashites, the Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites," then in the next phrase, "seven nations larger and stronger than you!" Were there seven nations in Canaan larger and stronger than the Israelites, when the Israelites were 2 or 3 million people? That is repeated numerous times in Deuteronomy. Go down to chapter 7 verse 17, "You may say to yourselves, these nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" They have an army of 600,000 people? Go to Deuteronomy 9:1, "Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and possess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls

up to the sky. The people are strong and tall.” Deuteronomy 11:23, “Then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you.” So you have phrases like that. If you go back to Exodus 23:29, you have another interesting statement. There you read, “The Lord says of the Canaanites, Hittites, and Hivites, ‘But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land will become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you.’” Sounds like Israel’s population wouldn’t be large enough to manage the country to keep the people under control. So the Lord says that he’s not going to drive them out immediately. So questions have been raised about how to understand these census figures.

2) Understanding Large Numbers in the OT: 3 Approaches

a) Numbers are Literal and Accurate

There are three basic approaches for the interpretation of large numbers. Let me make some comments about each of them and then come back to the larger question. The first approach is those who accept the census numbers as they are translated in our English Bibles on the basis that the way in which those numbers are translated in our English Bibles. This is the most apparent meaning of the Hebrew terms and words that are used in the original text. If you look at your citations page 41, I have two representatives of that viewpoint. Bottom of the page, MacRae in the New Bible Commentary, “The large numbers in this census have created a difficulty for some readers, who find it hard to believe that the nation of Israel was so numerous during its march through the wilderness. Yet when we consider the large families that were customary and the length of time that was spent in Egypt before the beginning of the oppression, the amount of increase is seen to be not at all unreasonable.” If you go on to page 44, E. J. Young takes the same viewpoint. He says, “Three objections to these chapters have been made. One, if the number of fighting men was about 600,000, the total population, it is claimed, would then be about 2 1/2 million, and it would have been

impossible for the seventy families which came into Egypt to have multiplied thus rapidly during the time of their oppression.” He says it’s not impossible, because of the fruitfulness of the Hebrews. “Two, the wilderness of Sinai, it is claimed, could not have sustained so great a group of people.” But as he argues, it was the miraculous hand of the Lord that sustained them. “Three, the order of the march is said to be impossible.” He says, “But if the account is so impossible, no writer would have devised such an impossible scheme. The very difficulty involved is but an indication of historicity. Since so little is said about the details of the march, we are in no position to question the historicity and accuracy of the statements made.” So there are numerous evangelical scholars who support the numbers as they stand, as they are translated in our English versions.

b) Numbers are Artificially Contrived and Exaggerated

There is a second way to approach these numbers. This is a pretty typical, critical view, in which it could be said there is no value in the census numbers at all. They are artificially contrived and completely untrustworthy. The argument is that these totals comport to a much later time, that the numbers are exaggerated and of no significance. One commentator says, “They have no statistical value whatever.” So some accept them as they are and some say there’s no value whatever.

Third category. There are those who do not accept the numbers as translated in our modern versions, but attempt to find some explanation for them based on an alternate understanding of the meaning of the original text. In other words, those of this viewpoint say there’s something going on here in the original text that we don’t fully understand and the way they are translated in our modern versions represent something other than a proper translation of the original language of the text. Now some advocates of this viewpoint are evangelical scholars who will accept the trustworthiness of the text. If you look at the history of the interpretation of these numbers in this latter category, long ago a man

named Flinders Petrie, one of the early archaeologists of ancient Egypt pointed out that the Hebrew word, *eleph*, has two meanings. *Eleph* can be translated, “thousands.” You have the *elephim* there, the plural of it, so *eleph* can and is often translated, “thousands.” But it also can be translated as “tribal group” or “clan,” something of that sort. Look at Judges 6:15. In Judges 6:15, this is the story of Gideon. Gideon says to the Lord, “How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” When Gideon says, my “clan” is the weakest in Manasseh, that’s the word *eleph*. Some sort of a tribal sub-unit.

If you go to I Samuel 10:19, you read there, “But you have now rejected your God who saved you out of all your calamity and distresses. And you have said, ‘No, set a king over us.’” This is the assembly at Mizpah. “So now present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and clans.” “Clans” there is *elephim*, the plural of *eleph*. So Flinders Petrie looked at texts like that, where *eleph* did not mean “thousand,” but had some other meaning, like some sort of a tribal subgroup of some sort.

So what he did with the numbers that are given in Numbers 1, for each of the tribes, say, for example, verse 35, let’s just pick one; where it says, “The number from the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.” If you look at the Hebrew text that’s 32 *elephim*, and two *me’ots* for hundreds. So he would say the *elephim* refers to tent-groups; the *me’ots* refers to the number of fighting men in a tribe. So that in the case of Manasseh, there will be 32 tent-groups, *elephim*, and there will be 200 fighting men. So he concluded there were 598 tent-groups, if you add all of them up, in which there were 5,550 fighting men. In other words, about 9.5 fighting men per tent-group. But he admitted that he really can’t handle all the numbers in that way, because this really doesn’t explain verse 46, where you get 603,550. It doesn’t work with that number. And also for example, on Numbers 3:22, where you have the number of all the males a month old or more counted was 7 *elephim* 7 tent-groups in which there were 500. In other words, the ratio seems out of proportion; 7 tent-groups – 500 men. So that was one suggestion that

hasn't really taken hold very much.

d) Eleph → Aluph = Chiefs, Captains

R.E.D. Clark came up with another idea. He took that same root, the *aleph lamed he*, but pointed it differently, and instead of *eleph* he pointed it adding the vowels that render it as *aluph* which means “chief” or “captain,” so that in the numbers you would have certain number of captains, and then the hundreds part of the number, to indicate the warriors.

e) Wenham's - Family or Clans

A different, or a kind of modified form, of that theory was worked out further by John Wenham. He wrote an article in the Tyndale Bulletin called, “Large Numbers in the Old Testament.” If you look at your citation page 42, bottom of the page, there are a few paragraphs out of Wenham's article, on “Large Numbers of the Old Testament,” and you notice that it begins, “There are various ways of taking *eleph* without involving impossibly large numbers. It could be a social unit – family, clan, tent-group or a military unit... Or it could be an officer or a specially trained warrior.” And he kind of goes with that idea, I don't want to read all this; it's very complex and detailed. You might want to get the whole article and read it sometime if you're interested in this. But notice the middle part of page 43. “There are reasons for thinking that the captains of thousands might normally have had 7 or 8 *me'ot* under their command. Similarly the actual strength of an average *me'ah*”—that's a hundred. He takes the *me'ot* as a military unit—“the actual strength of an average *me'ah* might have been about 75 men. 235 and a half *me'ah* of 75 men would give about 17,662 1/2 men in all. This, together with 580 *elephim*, would give a total fighting force of a little over 18,000.” And then he says, “If we double this again, in order to include women, we shall get a figure of about 72,000 for the whole migration.” That's his bottom line. When he translates these words, he comes up with 72,000 for the population, with 18,000 fighting

men.

f) Vannoy's Thoughts – None of These Approach Are Convincing and Difficulties

So there had been various attempts made to deal with these numbers. I don't think any of the suggestions are totally convincing. None of them fit all the data. They particularly don't fit the summary statement that you find in the text. I don't think a lot of the difficulties cited with the numbers are insurmountable, though the logistics, particularly of how could 2.5 million people survive in the wilderness of Sinai for all that time is staggering. Granted, God provided in miraculous ways. I don't think that the number was something that could not have been obtained during the time of Joseph's stay in Egypt in the Exodus, during that 400-year period. They could have multiplied to that extent.

It seems to me that where the problem is, and I do think there is a problem here, is with those biblical texts we looked at, "seven nations greater and mightier than you." And then in addition, what we know about the size of the cities and the population of Canaan at the time of conquest. If you look at the size of the cities, pick Jericho, for example, the first city they took. How big do you think Jericho was? Anybody have any idea? It's a mound, and the walls of the foundation are still there. It's 7 acres! In other words, it's a city about the size of the property of this school's parking lot. We wouldn't call that a city! Now that was admittedly a smaller city; there were about 2,500 that inhabited Jericho. Lachish was 18 acres; Gibeon 16; Megiddo, 13; and Ai, 27 acres. So you're talking about pretty small settlements. Jericho's population was about 2,500 people.

Look at page 42 of your citation. Roland DeVaux, in his *Life and Institutions of Ancient Israel*, says, "The towns of the Bible were not large. It's astonishing to see from the excavations just how small they were. Most of them could easily be fitted into Trafalgar Square, and some would scarcely fill the courtyard of the National Gallery. The Annals of Tiglath-pileser III give a list of

the towns in Galilee conquered in 732; the number of captives varies between 400 and 650—and this king used to deport entire populations. They were, then, villages like those today, and no bigger.” Next paragraph, “For Samaria and Jerusalem other sources of information is available. Sargon II says that he carried 27,290 persons from Samaria.” Next paragraph, “For Jerusalem, the figures of Nebuchadnezzar’s deportations are difficult... At a reasonable estimate, in our Lord’s time the city had about twenty-five or thirty thousand inhabitants. A few years ago this was just the population of the Old City within the walls, and in roughly the same space. The population cannot have been much bigger in Old Testament times.”

So these cities were small. In the battle between Rameses II and the Hittites we talked about that in connection with the Hittite Treaties and also in connection with the Exodus and Pharaoh of the oppression, according to Breasted, in his *Ancient Records of Egypt*, the armies were about 20,000 each for the Hittites and Egyptians at the Battle on the Orontes River. Well, now, if the Hittites and Egyptians armies were 20,000; was Israel’s army 600,000?

Furthermore, if you go back to Exodus 18, where you remember Jethro gave Moses the advice to form judges over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, if Israel had 2 million people, it would be a minimum of 600,000 men, for 2 million people. Think about what Jethro told Moses to do. If he implemented that like it says he did, he would have had to appoint 2,000 rulers over the thousands; 20,000 rulers of the hundreds; 40,000 rulers of fifty; and 200,000 rulers of tens. So he would have made 262,000 appointees. Then you think, Moses was doing all that work himself, before he appointed these people. That is just an attempt from Exodus 18, to work out the system that’s spoken of there, on the basis of a population of 2 million.

One wonders, “Is there something going on in these census figures that we don’t understand?” That’s where I’m inclined to come down on this. There is a Latin phrase, called “nonreflect,” something on which you cannot speak, because

you do not have enough evidence to formulate a firm conclusion. I think more work needs to be done on these census numbers. But more importantly than more work, I think more light needs to be thrown on what's going on in these numbers. I don't think the presently suggested ways of dealing with the text are adequate.

Conclusion: Leaving the Numbers Unknown until More Work is Done

If you look at page 41, there's one paragraph there by R. K. Harrison, toward the bottom of the page. He says, "None of these attempts to scale down the Old Testament numbers is able to account satisfactorily for all the data involved, and hence the suggestions made cannot be taken as uniformly valid for purposes of interpretation. If other evidence from Near Eastern sources concerning numbers generally is of any value in this connection, it would imply that the Old Testament numerical computations" here is the crux of it, "rest upon some basis of reality which was quite familiar to the ancients, but which is unknown to modern scholars." I think that's probably what's going on here.

I think whatever the text says, I think is reliable. I'm not sure we understand the language there correctly. In other words, that *eleph* seems to be of military significance to this point, as a commander of military units or something of that sort rather than a strictly numerical kind of equivalence for thousands or hundreds. I think there is something going on that we do not fully understand. That being the case, it's very difficult to say how many it is. It was enough that made Egypt concerned that they were getting too large to control. But on the other hand, it seems unreasonable to think that the army of Israel was 600,000 when Egypt had an army of only 20,000. So the text is reliable, but there's something going on here that is not well understood from our rather limited modern vantage point.

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