

be tempted to use it for further unjustified conquest. The line between the two situations is sometimes hard to draw exactly. God commands careful examination of resources and their effective use for His righteous purposes, but He forbids piling up possessions for our own selfish purposes and sinful pride.

i. God commands the census to be taken (i.1-3). The tabernacle of the congregation (1), probably better rendered 'ten of meeting,' as in RV. The Hebrew word moedh never denotes a group of people; it indicates the meeting together of God with Moses or of God with the people. On the first day of the second month, in the second year,(1). Note that this date is just one month after the rearing up of the tabernacle (Ex.xi.17), which occurred one year after the departure from Egypt. The departure from Sinai occurred exactly twenty days later (x.11). The first ten chapters tell us many of the things which were done during this period. It hardly seems likely that Moses and Aaron, with twelve assistants, could have taken all this census in so short a time, and certainly not on a single day. About nine months earlier (Ex.xix. 1, xxx. 11ff., xxxviii.26) God had commanded that the people be numbered and that a half shekel be collected from each. The total number was 603,550, exactly the number of our present census. It is most probable that our present chapter describes the tabulation by Moses of the full results of a census which actually began several months earlier.

ii. The census officials selected (i. 4-16). A leader was chosen from each tribe to take part in the numbering. These are men of special standing in their tribes. Note, however, that the word rendered renowned (16) simply means 'called.' It may indicate recognition of worth, but more likely means merely that these were men designated previously as leaders of the highest rank. It may be observed that the tribes are not named here in order of birth (cf. Gn.xxix.32-xxx.24,xxxv.16-18). Leah's sons (omitting Levi) are all placed first, then Rachel's descendants, then the four sons of the two concubines. Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the leader of Judah (7), was an ancestor of Christ (Mt.i.4; Lk.iii.32-33).