

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICATIONS OF THE CENSUS IN THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI (NM 1)

Abstract

Divine books, and Scriptures, are special, as they have a very clear place and purpose. The word of God, in the form of a letter, reveals itself to our hearts, speaking of His plan to save the human race. The fourth book of the Pentateuch, *Numbers*, owes its title to the two censuses reported and to the abundance of numerical information scattered throughout the book. The events took place when the Israelites were about to embark on their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, which explains the need to arrange them in a precise order, like a marching army. Although the historical aspect should not be questioned, if it were only a matter of censuses, the presence of these numerators in the Scripture would not be justified. Therefore, it is wrong to consider that the events mentioned here are simple segments of Israelite history; instead, we must understand that they are very important precisely because they are addressed to Christians, who must learn from these experiences. Thus, for Christians, the theme of the book may be spiritual progress, for in it we can identify many applications to the experiences of the Christians living in the modern era, showing how much we resemble the ancient Israelites, but, if we understand properly the message of the sacred text, we will not have to repeat the wanderings of the Israelites in our own spiritual itinerary.

Keywords

Book of Numbers, census, counting, spiritual interpretation

Introduction

Just like the other two previous books (Exodus and Leviticus), the Book of Numbers also starts with a coordinating conjunction, which shows that it must be



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understood as part of a unitary work (Pentateuch) and not as a separate book (Companion Bible 1951, 177). Although it is neither the best-known book of the Scripture (of the Old Testament or of the Pentateuch) nor the most popular or famous one, if it is tackled correctly, on the right exegetic note, this precious book can reveal the “Word of God” (“The Lord spoke to Moses”, acc. Nm 1:1), mysteriously hidden in the letter of the old law. In the pages of this book, we can see God “at work”, God “in action”. The God of order numbers His people (identifying those who are ready to bear witness, to fight), organises them (working by means of a hierarchy), sets out their behaviour (teaching them the importance of worship) and separates them from other peoples, so that they may remain pure and He may continue to live among them.

Similar to each book of the Scripture, which has a content, a purpose and a specific plan, closely followed by the hagiographer, the Book of Numbers describes the journey of the Israelite people, who had just gone out of Egypt, through the wilderness. To Christians, this book has a special meaning, as, if studied in depth, it gives us the possibility to partake of its infinite “beauty” and “wisdom” (Mackintosh, 1). The book can have “a unique contribution to the life of the Christian” if “the general presentation of the historical framework is regarded from the point of view of a parallel with Christian life” (Irving L. Jensen apud MacDonald 2002, 153). [our translation]

The events mentioned in the Book of Numbers are not only “segments of Hebrew history”; instead, we need to understand that they took place “for the spiritual edification” of the Christian, who has “the sacred duty to learn from the mistakes made by the children of Israel”, to avoid repeating them. “The subject of the book is the spiritual journey and progress (or the absence thereof!)”, which is why “Christians must avoid considering this book an arid textbook containing the history” of the chosen people. On this note, these narrations gain higher value. Thus, “the book is full of applications to the experiences of the Christians living in the modern era”, showing “how much we resemble the ancient Israelites”. Just like them, when we “complain”, we spiritually “fall” and become “guilty of a crass lack of faith”. If we understand the message of the sacred text, we will be spared from “repeating the wandering of the Israelites in our own spiritual pilgrimage” (MacDonald 2002, 153-154). [our translation]

Biblical Censuses

Censuses in the Books of Genesis and Exodus

The census of the chosen people began almost half a millennium before the event narrated in Numbers (1), with the call of Abraham, the patriarch thus being the first to be “numbered”. For 75 years (Gn 13:1-3), the “census lists” included only one person and, for a long while, this “list” remained unchanged, in spite of blessings and of the renewal of the Covenant (Gn 15:1-6 et seq.). Only 25 years later, did the second name, Isaac, appear on the “list”. Essentially, the history of Abraham “was closely connected to a numbering”, given that, as far as the existence and the number of his offspring is concerned, for quite a while there was nothing he could number (Fărăgău 2011, 82). Although different terms are used, each renewal of the Covenant mentions a numbering of Abraham’s offspring: “if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted” (Gn 13:16), “... number the stars, if you are able to number them... So shall your offspring be” (Gn 15:5).

The verb from the Book of Numbers (1:3) (נִסְפְּרוּם = “numbering them”, from the נִסְפַּר form), which was first used in the Book of Genesis, in the episode when Sarah conceived Isaac, shows the connection between Abraham and the first census in the Book of Numbers. However, in this case, the translation of the verb has the meaning of “visiting” (“The Lord visited Sarah”, acc. Gn 21:1). The Masoretic text uses the same verb when narrating about Joseph in Egypt, saying that Potiphar “made him overseer” of his house (Gen 39:4-5), “the guard appointed Joseph” (Gn 40:4), “appoint overseers” (Gn 41:34). In the last chapter of the same book, we can find the verb twice (Gn 50:24-25), consecutively, “נִסְפְּרָהּ נִסְפְּרָהּ”, a construct translated as “God will surely visit you”. These meanings of the verb are not directly related to a census, but they do point to divine preoccupation for the chosen people, which explains the very divine act of numbering the Israelites. We notice that, after three generations, Abraham’s offspring reach 70 (75 according to the Septuagint) souls, who, together with patriarch Jacob/Israel, settle in Egypt (Gn 46:8-27) (Lesetre 1912, 1684).

The census mentioned in the Book of Exodus (30:11-16) is not the same as the one mentioned in Numbers 1; they are two separate numberings, whose purpose is different. Nonetheless, the census mentioned in the Book of Exodus seems to have been the basis for the first census from the Book of Numbers, hence the similar total numbers (MacDonald 2002, 155). Although a census is a “socio-economic necessity”, as God is

“the only one entitled to know the real number of His subjects”, embarking upon such an action without divine consent can be considered “a sin against God” (*Anania in The Bible or the Holy Scripture* 2001, 112). [our translation] The conviction according to which a census might cause a plague is expressed, which is why a fee must be paid to the sanctuary as “ransom” (“When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them” acc. Ex 30:11-12) for the lives of those who are numbered (Court 2010, 516).

According to some researchers (Usca 2003, 7), “those of the congregation who were recorded ... listed in the records, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men” (38:25-26) would represent a first census, to which the first chapter of the Book of Numbers would come back. [our translation] Other researchers believe that the lists with those who came to give silver for the sanctuary (Ex 38:26) were used for the two numberings (Biblical Dictionary 1996, 450). A month before the census mentioned in Numbers 1, right before building the Tabernacle (Ex 30:11-16), God commanded Moses to number the Israelites again, which he did (Ex 38:25-26). Some rabbinic commentaries compare the Israelites with “a pile of wheat”, which is numbered every time it is taken to the barn; God does the same with His people and numbers them on every occasion (Numbers Rabbah 1:4). Rabbi Rashi believes that God wants people to be numbered so often because He holds them, dear, while rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) presents a more pragmatic reason, claiming that the census in the Book of Exodus allowed the Israelites to bring their contribution to the Holy Tabernacle.

Censuses in the Book of Numbers

If early rabbis called it *סֵפֶר הַיְיָדִבֵּר*, meaning “The Book ‘The Lord said’”, based on the opening words of this book of the Pentateuch, later on, the following title stood up: *בְּמִדְבָּר* (= “in the wilderness”), another word from the first verse. In the Talmudic period, the book also received the title of “Chumash” of the Numbered/Censuses (those numbered), as it contains the presentation of the two censuses of the Israelites (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Judaica* 2000, 574). Thus, considering these two censuses from chapters 1 and 26 (38 years apart) and the abundance of numerical data it contains, the book is justly called Numbers (MacDonald 2002, 153), which corresponds to the title from the Septuagint (*Ἀριθμοὶ*).

The First Census (Nm 1)

The numbering mentioned in the first chapter aims to underscore the dynamics of an Israelite camp moving in the wilderness (Court 2010, 431). The events narrated at the beginning of the Book of Numbers happened a year and a month after the departure from Egypt and a month after the Holy Tabernacle was erected (Ex 40:17). The Israelites are on the verge of the setting off on their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, which explains why it is necessary to arrange them in a precise order, similar to marching armies. That is why God commanded a census that would include all men from twenty years old and upward, who were able to go to war (MacDonald 2002, 155).

After Moses arranged legal matters, once again at God's urge, he focused on numbering his people. This action is regarded as a numbering of the "army", as it is believed that he also wanted to have war-related matters in good order (Flavius Josephus 1999, 169), given that he aimed to prepare a military campaign to conquer the Promised Land (which would have indeed happened, if it had not been for the regrettable episode caused by the Israelite spies who were sent to the Holy Land to bring information). In this respect, the numbering is understood as a "military" census, which "follows the the pattern of a military camp, having God as supreme commander" (Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols 2011, 846). [our translation]

Lord Sabaoth (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) is the "Lord of armies", not of the army, because He has two armies, not one, at His disposal. God is commanding the heavenly armies and, through the census of His people, He also registers an earthly army. Although the two armies belonged to two different spheres, from distinct realities, they had common battles (Jo 5:13-15). The census was aimed at all those who could handle a weapon at war, as God did not want an army of mercenaries; His people was His army (Fărăgău 2011, 75).

The Second Census (Nm 26)

The two censuses mentioned in Numbers are 38 years apart: the first took place in the Sinai Desert, in the second year of the Exodus (a month after the tabernacle was erected, acc. Ex 40:17), and the second on the Plains of Moab, right before the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

In the first chapter, the order of the censused tribes seems to follow the hierarchy in the Book of Genesis (35:23-26), which enumerates the sons of Jacob, as

they were born, grouped however according to their mother (the first mentioned are the six sons of Leah, then the two sons of Rachel and only afterwards the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the servants). There are a few differences in the Book of Numbers with respect to this enumeration: the Levites, the priestly caste, are no longer on the list, as they were not numbered, and the caste of Joseph is divided in two (Ephraim and Manasseh) and the castes of Naphtali (the tenth) and Asher (the twelfth) swap positions. In the case of the second Census (Nm 26), the order of castes also changes, and the offspring of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh swap positions (the seventh and the eighth). An important aspect is that the caste of Gad, the second to last (eleventh position) on the list from the first census, is mentioned third during the second census. Even more interesting is that the same situation is also present in the Masoretic text and in the Vulgate and was also adopted in the Romanian editions. However, the Septuagint presents a different order: the caste of Gad comes sixth, Asher seventh, the offspring of Joseph (Manasseh and then Ephraim) swap positions here as well and the castes of Dan and Naphtali are listed on the last two positions.

At first sight, we might consider the results of the census only random numbers, but, if we look at this in more detail, we notice that, after the first census, the caste of Manasseh was the smallest and that of Judah the biggest. In a relatively short period of 38 years, we can expect only small changes, a slight growth or decline, due to the births-deaths ratio (Jonathan Rosenberg).

The first census listed 603,550 men, aged over 20, while the second listed 601,730 people, 1,820 fewer. Some castes declined: Simeon lost 37,100 men, Naphtali 8,000, Ephraim 8,000, Gad 5,150 and Reuben 2,770, while others grew: Manasseh – 20,500, Asher – 11,900, Benjamin – 10,200, Issachar – 9,900, Zebulun – 3,100, Judah – 1,900 and Dan – 1,700 (Lesetre 1912, 1685).

There are two castes which do not fit in a probability calculation. We notice a significant decline among the caste of Simeon (from the third caste, in terms of size, it becomes the smallest) and an important growth among the caste of Manasseh (from the smallest, it grows above the average). Perhaps the data from the censuses take so much space precisely to draw our attention to certain aspects. On closer inspection, these numbers show that, from a numerical point of view, the castes were more or less the same; the differences between them could change, but the two aforementioned cases cannot be accidental (Jonathan Rosenberg).

The decline in the number of men from the caste of Simeon was a consequence and a sign of divine disfavour. In the episode of Num. 25, when the people bowed down to Baal of Peor at Shittim, after which 24,000 people died, an important negative role was played by “Zimri, ... chief of a father’s house belonging to the Simeonites” (Nm 25:14). In such cases of inappropriate behaviour, which were quite frequent during the wandering through the wilderness, those who sinned were punished; it might be that the Simeonites were disproportionately represented among those who sinned. Moreover, the result of the second census could be the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Jacob and Israel (“... and scatter them in Israel” Gn 49:7). The number of Simeonites declined to approximately 23,000 men, just like the Levites, which explains the territory they received within the caste of Judah (Jonathan Rosenberg).

We can explain the major growth of the people of Manasseh, which probably caused the reversed order of the offspring of Joseph during the second census, through two events: the request of the daughters of “Zelophehad... from the clans of Manasseh” to inherit their father’s possession (Nm 26:1) and the capturing of the city of Gilead by the sons of Manasseh (Nm 32:39-42). These events show the outstanding initiative of some of the members of the caste of Manasseh. In this respect, the population growth in the tribe of Manasseh could be a reward for their active attitude. Thus, the numbers from this census are not random; they are mentioned in the holy text “to give a lesson” (Jonathan Rosenberg). [our translation]

This second census is extremely relevant, as the territory of the Holy Land is later divided based on these numbers (Nm 26:54) (Lesetre 1912, 1685).

Authenticity and Historicity of the Census (Nm 1)

The authenticity and historicity of the census described in the first chapter of the book are supported by the text, which contains sufficient data, and by a structure revolving around the divine commandment (Nm 1:2-4) and the narration of its fulfilment (Nm 1:17-19). From the very beginning, we find out who the author of the census is: “The Lord spoke to Moses” (1:1). The first verse also tells us where and when the narrated events take place. The location is “in the wilderness of Sinai”; more precisely, Moses receives the commandment in “the tabernacle of the testimony” (1:1). As far as time is concerned, the text mentions: “on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt” (1:1).

Therefore, on the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, the Israelites came into the wilderness of Sinai, “the Mountain of God” (Ex 19:3). The events narrated in chapters 20 and 40 of the Book of Exodus took place over the course of the nine remaining months of the same year, for, in the first month of the following year, the Holy Tabernacle was erected and sanctified (Ex 40:2). From this event until the first census (Nm 1), only a month passed, which researchers claim was included in the Book of Leviticus (Fărăgău 2011, 71).

The text of the Scripture is very precise and indicates even who should be numbered during this census. The divine message was extremely explicit: “Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head. From twenty years old and upward, all in Israel who are able to go to war, ... shall list them, company by company.” (Nm 1:2-3). Nothing is left to chance, as there are indications even about who should number the people: “... you and Aaron shall list them... And there shall be with you a man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers.” (1:3-4). Trying to imagine the “scope of the office of numbering the castes of the people of Israel in a full journey through the desert”, Maxwell highlights the leaders who shared this extremely difficult task and managed to organise the “chaos”. Through the census, they evaluated their “resources” and found out “who the people were and how many were accompanying them on their journey”. “This mammoth task was very well organised and efficiently executed” (Maxwell 2007, 79). [our translation]

However, if it were only for the censuses, there would be no justification for the presence of these numberings in the Scripture (Usca 2003, 8). Although the numbers resulting from the census, presented on this occasion, are omitted by almost all researchers, who consider them unimportant, tiresome and downright boring, many analyses can be carried out based on this data. If we estimate that those numbered during the census accounted for 20-25 % of the people, the whole number of Israelites reached 2,5-3 million people. Some researchers believe this number to be too big, as they cannot explain how they could multiply so fast, over the course of a few generations, and how such a big group of people could be disciplined during their journey through the wilderness. Nonetheless, others have managed to prove the mathematical possibility of reaching this number.

Spiritual Interpretation of the Census (Nm 1)

The one who wants to go further with research and to get to the spiritual meaning of the text can do so by means of the mysterious content of the Book of Numbers if God bestows upon them the generosity of His sublime light. To “get to Jesus,... to evolve towards perfection in Christ”, we must “first go back to the school of Moses and rid ourselves of childish lack of understanding” (Origen 1981, 144). [our translation] Seeing that the events narrated in the Old Testament also have a typical value, Saint Paul gives us the right direction to appreciate the history of the chosen people, showing that “... these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our [namely, Christians’] instruction...” (1 Cor 10:11). Origen understands the narrated event in a similar way and also insists on the fact that “this text contains a mystery” and that “the intention of the Holy Spirit” is not to show us which part of the people was numbered and which not. Those who read the Scripture would get nothing out of such information and knowing these details (which part of the people was listed/numbered in the wilderness and which not) would not contribute to our salvation (Origen 1981, 139). [our translation]

These lists, which present a true classification (“taxonomy”) of the Israelites, must not be understood only from a historical perspective (“historical report”), but as part of the “interpretative staging of the book”. If the first list is that of the “old generation”, that of Moses, who had been disobedient and would be harshly judged, the second one refers to the “new generation”, who showed obedience and would be invited to the Promised Land. Thus, the two censuses have the role of showing the contrast between the two generations, a “failed” and a “faithful” one, separated by the “extent of their disobedience towards Yahweh” (Dennis Olson apud Brueggemann 2012, 100-101). [our translation]

A supporter of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scripture, Origen “always looks for the deeper, moral or mysterious meaning of words” (Origen 1981, 140, note 5). [our translation] The “dawning” (starting point) of his exegesis is “Paul’s sentence”: “law is spiritual” (Rm 7:14). Therefore, the sacred text will “generate a great benefit for the soul” only if we understand it from a spiritual point of view (Origen 1981, 140). [our translation] Together with historical narrations, which also have a typological meaning, the numbers mentioned in the Scripture also have a spiritual, not only literal, meaning. Since “numbers” symbolise holiness and perfection (Mehat 1951, 69), not all were worthy of being included in these “holy numbers”. That is why the census

of the castes of Israel was not carried out when they went out of the land of Egypt, for they needed to go through a series of tests which gave them the opportunity to evolve spiritually.

Over the course of the events narrated in the Book of Numbers, the God of Law spoke to His people on many occasions (Companion Bible 1951, 177) and He still does (“The Lord spoke...” acc. Nm 1:1), showing that the numbering is carried out “on God’s command”. The existence of a certain order as to those to be included in the “Numbers of God” is clear in the Biblical text, according to which the following were not to be numbered: women (due to female weakness), servants (due to their standard of life and manners), Egyptians (as they were foreigners and pagans), neither were all the Israelites (only those from twenty years old and upward, “who were able to go to war” (Origen 1981, 139). Here, Origen differentiates between “various degrees in the process of Christian perfection” (Origen 1981, 140, note 6). [our translation]

It is interesting to notice that, on the one hand, God “numbers” “the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names” (Ps 147:4) and in particular those who will be saved, but, on the other hand, those who die are “too many to count” (Wisdom of Solomon 1:12). This proves that, before God, the number of saints is taken into account (Origen 1981, 140), that what God appreciates and loves He numbers and takes care of, which is why the Scripture assures us that: “even the hairs of your head are all numbered” (Mt 10:30). The request of the Scripture, “all in Israel who are able to go to war, you and Aaron shall list them” (Nm 1:3) shows that the Israelite is not supposed to have only a certain age, but also a certain power. Only the one who goes to war with “the power of Israel” shall be counted before God; only that power, guided by God, which shines through the Holy Scripture, is numbered (Origen 1981, 139, 141).

Geometry, music or magic, the philosophy conveyed under the veil of allegory (“Egyptian wisdom”), astrology (“Assyrian wisdom”) and encyclopaedic studies (“Greek wisdom”) (Mehat 1951, 73) have “nothing to do with the number of God”. Since the power of the soul of Greek philosophers heralds man’s pride, the power of Assyrians/Chaldeans becomes the object of astrological studies and the supposed science of Egyptians is mysterious, they are not taken into account by God (Origen 1981, 141).

The Israelites were not numbered when they went out of Egypt, because the Pharaoh was still following them, nor when they went into the wilderness, for they had not been tested by the enemies, or when they fought against Amalek and defeated

him, or when they received manna and water from the rock because they did not have in them what they needed to be numbered. They were not numbered even when the Tabernacle of the testimony was erected, but they were numbered after the Law was given to them through Moses after the forms of the offering were prescribed and the cultic ritual was established (Origen 1981, 142).

In the stations on the road to the Promised Land, Origen sees stages of spiritual ascent, an ascent of the soul towards God: going out of the land of Egypt means breaking away from the devil, the Red Sea crossing represents Baptism (Origene 1947, 145), the entrance into the wilderness is the beginning of askesis, the battle against Amalek means the good deeds, the manna and the rock are the food of the soul, the tabernacle means virtues (Origene 1947, 214) and the law is the preparation (Origen 1981, 142).

In order to be worthy of being among those who are numbered (Origen 1981, 140), among those who go to war, the Scripture urges us to “give up childish ways and become men” (1 Cor 13:11). The man able to go to war, who is young, meaning who has reached “spiritual vigour” and the level of fulfilling Christ’s will, is written in the book of God, being valued and therefore numbered and known to God. If the actual writing is done through Moses and Aaron, the spiritual one is carried out through Christ, Who, in the image of Moses and Aaron, becomes “for us both a lawmaker and a faithful and innocent high priest” (Cyril 1991, 118). [our translation]

As a lawmaker, Christ “gives us laws and advice” and, as a high priest, He “presents His offering and prayer for us to His Father”. Christ is our “Lawmaker (Guider) and High Priest (Supporter) at all times. Those whom Christ writes in Him are written for eternity”, in each and everyone’s un mistakeable uniqueness (Cyril 1991, 119-120, nota 138). Through Moses and Aaron as an image (type), Christ writes those who fight manly (Cyril 1991, 120), just as the Scripture says: “... rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). As earthly high offices follow a heavenly model (Usca 2003, 9), the “man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers” (Nm 1:4-5), appointed by each caste to help Moses and Aaron number the people, the “most fearsome and warring” leader and defender represent the angels, who are appointed to rule those who are chosen and written in the book of life (Cyril 1991, 119). [our translation]

Each shall be valued according to spiritual rules and shall find themselves “in the place where the worthiness of their deeds put them”. The placing of each and

everyone “in his own order” (1 Cor 15:23) means that those who are like or related to Reuben through their behaviour, deeds and life, shall be numbered with him, and those who show obedience shall be numbered with the Simeonites, those who fulfilled well their priestly duties or who reached a higher degree of consummation in their office shall be numbered with the Levites and those who show royal feelings and guide well the people shall be numbered with the Judahites. Thus, each shall be attached to the caste they are related to through their deeds and manners (Origen 1981, 143).

Such moral-ethical aspects can also be noticed in the meaning of the names of the sons of Israel: Simeon means “obedience”, “Levi” – “holiness”, and “Judah” – “perfection” (Philo 1988, 367).

(Instead of) Conclusions... Possible Applications?

Do these verses provide any teaching which is useful to the contemporary Christian? Isn't the continuously lower demographic index of the Romanian people showing that we resemble the tribes who, instead of raising the number of those who were supposed to go into the Promised Land, sacrificed an entire generation, burying them in the desert?

Do Christians nowadays know their spiritual relatives? Can they say what their spiritual genealogical tree is, just like the Israelites? If we look for the natural genealogical tree of humankind we discover that we descend “from a lost people”, but Christians find their spiritual genealogical tree and origin in Christ. The Christian is “born from above” (Jn 3:3), “born again” (1 Pt 1:23), “born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5; Eph 5:26). Man's birth and worldly origin cannot be a reason to “boast”; instead, the Christians' “genealogical tree is heavenly”, for we are “Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29) and “sons of God” (Rom 8:14,16; Gal 3:26; Jn 3:2) (Mackintosh, 3-5). [our translation]

To set off on the journey through the wilderness and hope that you will get to the Promised Land, it is important from the very beginning to discover the group you belong to. Before going to war and before walking through the wilderness, it was essential for every member of the people of Israel to be able to say what their genealogical tree was. An uncertainty regarding this subject would have been a disaster (Mackintosh, 5).

Are Christians nowadays able to go to war, are they good fighters and testifiers, considering they do not even know their place in the Church? Just like an

Israelite could not have assumed a place in the camp, advanced through the wilderness or fought if they could not have said what their genealogical tree was, the Christians nowadays cannot advance in their Christian life through the wilderness of this world if they are uncertain regarding their belonging to the people of God.

These so-called Christians do not even know the meaning of real battle; they often consider their own fears, doubts, lack of knowledge and difficulties the Christian's real battle. A Christian's battle is against sin. Who can dare to join such a battle if they are uncertain of whether they are a Christian or not? In the battles carried out in the wilderness or in Canaan, each Israelite was capable of saying what their genealogical tree was and of recognising their "flag". To be able to go to war, "every member of the gathering who could carry a weapon had these two elements clear" (Mackintosh, 8-9). [our translation]

The people of Israel symbolise the Christian people, the people of God, who must travel through the wilderness of this world accompanied by God, not alone. The journey they have to take is very well organised, for their principles are theocratic, the people are made up of fighters, who protect their vital core, the Holy Tabernacle, where they have ordained servants who brought offerings to God, Who confessed Himself that He lived there (Andre 1994, 9).

The two censuses were a "review" of the people, the comparison of the "resulting numbers" giving us the possibility to notice the "severe consequences of sins" committed during the journey through the wilderness. The decline in the number of men belonging to a caste has a direct consequence, leading to a "smaller surface of land" to be inherited (Andre 1994, 10) [our translation] ("... every tribe shall be given its inheritance in proportion to its list" Num. 26: 54).

The scriptures of the Old Testament have this pedagogical value, presenting models for the modern Christian and materials which are useful in a missionary approach to the sacred text. If we make a parallel, we can consider such a census was taken in Romania in 2018, when we were called to register in God's camp. It was the referendum for normal matrimony between a man and a woman, in which not all Romanians participated, only those who were mature enough (spiritually) and willing to fight (give testimony) and be lynched (for now, only in the media) in the name of political correctness. Through our vote at the referendum, we agreed to be registered in the camp of the chosen people, and we enrolled in the divine army, being willing to go through the wilderness and enter the Holy Land.

Other battles will follow, which we must fight with love, not with hatred...
 ... or maybe another census? ...
 Synagogue.

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