

The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles - Part II

—
J. Barton Payne

In the previous article in this two-part series attention was given to numbered items in Chronicles that are paralleled in other Old Testament passages. This second article discusses the 57.8 percent of the numbers cited in Chronicles that are not paralleled elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is these items which Pfeiffer and others have most sweepingly characterized as “fabricated.”¹

Numbers from One to One Thousand

Men find it difficult to fault the Scriptures (and Chronicles) for exaggeration in respect to their small numbers, from one to ten. Likewise, among the medium-sized numbers, from eleven through one thousand, only a few numerals (in the category of “Measures”) have led to questions.

One passage (2 Chron. 3:4) concerns dimensions, in cubits, where the Masoretic text states that the porch of Solomon’s Temple was as long as the width of the house, i.e., twenty cubits, “and the height was 120.” The corresponding verse in 1 Kings (6:3) gives the porch’s width rather than its height, whose figure thus remains unique to Chronicles. Such a disproportionate amount, equalling 180 feet, is criticized by Myers as “certainly exaggerated.” He adds, however, that the “original may have read 20 cubits”²; and Curtis and Madsen say that the present, larger number is “universally regarded as a textual corruption.”³ The Masoretic text for the words quoted above is this: **וְהַגִּבֵּהּ מֵאֵהָ וְנֶעְשְׂרִים**. For the last two words a note in Kittel reads **אמרת**

¹ 1. Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 805. Cf. Ellison’s observation that “the truth of all sections not found in Samuel and Kings has been queried (they have even been regarded as inventions of the Chronicler)” (H. L. Ellison, “I and II Chronicles,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, eds. F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, and E. F. Kevan [London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1953], p. 340).

² 2. Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965), p. 16.

³ 3. Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 324.

עשרים, as supported by a number of Greek and Syriac manuscripts.⁴ The *New International Version* is thus to be commended for its restored rendering, “twenty cubits high.”

The remaining passages concern weights, figured in shekels or talents. Second Chronicles 3:9 contains a unique observation that within the Temple’s gold-plated holy of holies (its inner shrine) “the weight of the nails was fifty shekels [twenty ounces] of gold.” The critics’ objection, for once, is not of exaggeration, i.e., of too great a weight, but of too little, for the holding in place of all the gold sheeting. As Curtis and Madsen say, fifty shekels “is clearly impossible, and it is doubtful whether even the Chronicler would make such a careless statement”⁵; and they proceed to emend the text. Yet following Keil’s suggestion of “gilding,”⁶ there should be no lack of an adequate amount of nails, or even of spikes.

The talent is such a heavy weight (= 3,000 [or 3,600] shekels, or about seventy-five pounds) that even when counted by medium-sized numbers it still entails large quantities. Second Chronicles twice mentions a figure of one hundred talents of silver by which Amaziah hired mercenary troops from northern Israel (25:6, 9)—an amount over which he was justifiably concerned (25:9)! The book later quotes the same amount for an indemnity paid to Jotham by the Ammonites (27:5); and Myers comments that “the enormous amount of tribute is probably an exaggeration.”⁷ Yet Curtis and Madsen define the one hundred talents without negative comment, as, “in United States value *f* some \$187,500.”⁸ Furthermore, this sum was paid to Jotham only here and “in the second and the third year,” while a similar amount was received at Ebla from Mari at just one time, and a figure of 170 talents is known to have been paid every year to the Persians from Satrapy VII, northeast Baluchistan (of greater geographical extent, but the poorest in their empire).⁹ Thus one hundred talents hardly seems out of line. The identical figure in silver, plus an additional talent in gold, was later exacted by Necho from Judah and is recorded not only in 2 Chronicles (36:33) but also in 2 Kings (23:33).

Finally, 1 Chronicles 19:6, in telling how this same Ammonite kingdom hired more than thirty-two thousand Syrians against David, specifies the price—otherwise unstated in Scripture—to have been one thousand such talents. The figure is a huge one, proportionate to the gravity of their situation. “The Ammonites immediately recognized what must be the inevitable consequences of their outreach upon the ambassadors of a victorious neighbor; and they hasten to *f* an alliance with Syria.”¹⁰ This same number of one thousand talents reappears in the Persian

⁴ 4. *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. Rudolph Kittel, 3d ed. (Stuttgart: Wurt. Bibelanstadt, 1951), p. 4,380; cf. Ezekiel 42:16, אמרת, K, אמרת; Q, מארת.

⁵ 5. Curtis and Madsen, *The Books of Chronicles*, p. 327.

⁶ 6. C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 317.

⁷ 7. Myers, *II Chronicles*, p. 157; “3 tons,” p. 156.

⁸ 8. Curtis and Madsen, *The Books of Chronicles*, p. 454.

⁹ 9. On Ebla, see “Ideas,” *Newsweek*, November 15, 1976, p. 82, which cites 11,000 pounds of silver and 880 pounds of gold. Cf. A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 292–93; and H. R. Hall, *The Ancient History of the Near East*, 11th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1950), map facing p. 580.

¹⁰ 10. The Century Bible, p. 133.

tribute exacted from Satrapy XIII, Babylon (the richest in their empire). Ammon, of course, was no Babylon; but then, Ammon's payment was unique and not annual, and it was done in desperation. The figure is thus not impossible. Compare the discussion later in this article under "Measures" and also the far greater values of certain payments rendered to Solomon (more than four hundred talents, and 666 talents, each in *gold*, and the latter annually)—totals which again are confirmed not only in 2 Chronicles 8:18 and 9:13 but also in 1 Kings 9:28 and 10:14.

Numbers over One Thousand

Among the counted items which are unique to Chronicles, Ellison designated the ones associated with large figures "impossible."¹¹ He stated specifically that "numbers from a thousand and upwards were used f hyperbolically."¹² The distribution of these within Chronicles is interesting: twenty-eight instances of figures over one thousand in the half of the book that finds parallels elsewhere in Scripture, but ninety such numbers (over three times as many) in the parts that are not paralleled elsewhere. Yet these mathematical totals can be misleading because of repetitions that arise in the Chronicler's distinctive enumerations. The number twenty-four thousand, for example, occurs thirteen times in 1 Chronicles 27, one for each of the groups in David's militia; and various numbers that are larger than one thousand occur twelve times in 1 Chronicles 12:24–37, for each of the units that came to Hebron to make David king. Actually the ninety instances apply to some twenty-six distinct subjects, which are listed on the following table, in the order of their occurrence. The right-hand column shows the total of the numbers over one thousand that are found in each subject and on the left the reference for each subject is placed in one of four columns, to suggest its relative "acceptability," thus indicating the way in which it may be approached.

Table A

¹¹ 11. Ellison, "I and II Chronicles," p. 333.

¹² 12. Ibid.

Table A
Numbers over One Thousand, Unique to Chronicles

	Unnote-worthy	Interpret-able	Explain-able	Provi-dential		The Total of the numbers over 1,000
a			1 Chr 5:18		44,760 trans-Jordanian troops	1
b			5:21		Plunder and slain of the Hagarites	4
c		7:2-11,40			Tribal troops each numbering between 17,200 and 87,000	7
d	9:13				1,760 priests in Jerusalem	1
e		12:24-37			Between 3,000 and 120,000 in each of the tribal troops making David the king	12
f				22:14	David's gold and silver talents for the temple	2
g			23:3-5		Distribution of 38,000 Levites	5
h	26:30, 32				1,700 and 2,700 Levitical officials	2
i		27:1-15			24,000 for each militia group	13
j				29:4	Metal offered for the Temple	7
k			2 Chr 2:10		Barley and wine to Hiram's woodsmen	2

l			12:3		Shishak's chariots and 60,000 horsemen	2
m		13:3, 17			Ahijah (400,000) vs. Jeroboam (800,000)	3
n		14:9			Asa (580,000) vs. Zerah (1,000,000)	3
o			15:11		7,000 of Zerah's sheep sacrificed	1
p	17:11				7,700 Arab sheep and goats to Jehoshaphat	2
q		17:14-18			Between 200,000 and 300,000 in each division of Jehoshaphat's troops	5
r		25:5-6			Amaziah's troops of 300,000 and 100,000	2
s			25:11-12		10,000 Edomites slain and 10,000 executed	2
t	25:13				3,000 of Judah slain by mercenaries	1
u		26:12-13			Uzziah's troops, 307,500+	
v			27:5		Ammonite grain tribute of 10,000 kors	2
w		28:6, 8			120,000 of Judah slain and 200,000 taken captive	2
x	29:33				3,000 sheep for Hezekiah's celebration	1
y			30:24		1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep for Hezekiah's Passover	2
z			35:7-9		30,000+ of Josiah's Passover animals	4
	5	9	10	2		90

Because some of these items pertain to the same major categories and are interrelated, they may best be considered under the topics of "Things," "Persons," and "Measures."

Things

Items numbering over one thousand and mentioned only in Chronicles commence with 1 Chronicles 5. In that chapter most of the enumerations concern plunder seized from the Hagrites ("b" in the preceding table) by Israel's two and one-half eastern tribes (for "a," the number of the Israelite troops involved, see under "Persons"). But this accomplishment was no mere raid nor even a systematic tribute; it was a complete ethnic replacement: "They settled in their place" (5:22).¹³ The figures then are these: fifty thousand camels, two hundred fifty thousand sheep, two thousand donkeys, and one hundred thousand men (5:21). Myers objects: "The numbers are fantastically large, reflecting the writer's tendency

¹³ 13. Cf. Ellison, "This was a major victory, leading to an important addition of territory" (*ibid.*, p. 343).

to exaggerate on this point.”¹⁴ Yet he recognizes that “The Hagrites are found in Assyrian documents (see W. F. Albright) and the activity of the Transjordan tribes against the Arabs is just what might be expected in the 11th century.”¹⁵ Keil looks on the figures as explainable: “The war was a very serious one, in which the possession of the land was at stake a war of extermination”; and he cites a parallel campaign in Numbers 31 against Midian, where Moses reported Israel’s seizure of 61,000 donkeys (Num. 31:34) and 675,000 sheep (31:32).¹⁶ The corresponding figure of 32,000 humans (31:35) is admittedly lower but since this was limited to virgin women, the Chronicler’s figure of one hundred thousand אֲדָמָה (“humanity”) in 1 Chronicles 5:21 is again supported.

Subjects “o,” “x,” “y,” and “z,” on numbers of sacrificial animals, received suggested explanations in the first article in this series.

The only other large figures in this category (“p,” in the table just presented) concern an Arabian tribute to Jehoshaphat of 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats (2 Chron. 17:11). Even Curtis and Madsen grant “possibly some real historical reminiscence. It is possible some tribute from desert tribes was historical. For a similar tribute of flocks cf. II Kings 3:4.”¹⁷ That tribute was Meshah’s payment of one hundred thousand rams and the wool of one hundred thousand rams, beside which this tribute in 2 Chronicles 17:11 appears rather unnoteworthy.

Persons

Most of the Chronicler’s unique large numbers are used in his countings of people. Some of these are also so unnoteworthy as to require little comment: “d,” 1,760 preexilic priests who lived in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 9:13; cf. 9:1–2); “h,” those Levites who served as Davidic officials (2 Chron. 26:30–32)—hardly exaggerated numbers, since Curtis and Madsen refer to them as “only 1,700 overseers for western Palestine with 10 tribes,” while a figure of the 2,700 for the remaining two and one-half eastern tribes “seems strange but contains a hint of the importance of the district of Gilead”¹⁸; and “t,” the number in Judah (2 Chron. 13) who lost their lives to the disgruntled mercenaries from Ephraim, who “might well have killed 3,000 civilians in their lust for war and spoil.”¹⁹

One other large, nonmilitary headcount appears uniquely in Chronicles: “g,” David’s organization of the thirty-eight thousand Levites (1 Chron. 23:3–5) who were aged twenty²⁰ and

¹⁴ 14. Jacob M. Meyers, *I Chronicles*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965), p. 38. Wenham says the numbers are “difficult to interpret. It is probably wisest not to attempt to guess the original numbers” (W. J. Wenham, “Large Numbers in the Old Testament,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 8 [1967]:44).

¹⁵ 15. Myers, *I Chronicles*, p. 38.

¹⁶ 16. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, pp. 109–10.

¹⁷ 17. Curtis and Madsen, *The Books of Chronicles*, p. 394.

¹⁸ 18. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁹ 19. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” p. 45.

²⁰ 20. Based on the supplementary information in verse 27; cf. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, p. 253.

above. This total includes twenty-four thousand for Temple service, six thousand for officials, four thousand for gatekeepers, and four thousand for singers. Wenham adjudges this to be “the roundest of round numbers” or even less: “These figures lay down the proportion *f* not an actual count of those at work.”²¹ He proceeds to contrast the Chronicler’s smaller figures for other numbered groups of Levites (212 gatekeepers in 9:22, or 862 for conducting the ark in 15:5–10) and concludes that “all the figures of 23:3–5 should be divided by ten,” which would suggest 3,800. Yet in Moses’ day the Levites, only those between thirty and fifty years of age and able to do the work of carrying the Tabernacle, numbered 8,580 (Num. 4:47–48); and the tribes as a whole averaged more than fifty thousand warriors each (Num. 1:46; 26:51). The twenty-eight thousand Levites, furthermore, were divided into twenty-four courses; and, as Ellison says of the twenty-four thousand who were designated for Temple service, “one thousand on duty at any one time considering the scale of the work, is not unreasonable.”²² Wenham himself also proposes, “there might have been more Levites than the work merited.”²³

Twelve of the twenty-six subjects tabulated in the chart concern large numbers of troops. Some seem explainable as they stand. Regarding “a,” the 44,760 total muster for the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh (1 Chron. 5:18) is styled “colossal” by Wenham.²⁴ Yet the Hagrite war for which they were mobilized occurred in the days of Saul (5:10), and by Wenham’s own calculation, “It is reasonable to think that the number of men of military age *f* in the time of David might have risen *f* to 120,000.”²⁵ Even this is figured on a basic Israelite population of only half a million, which seems inadequate: the two and one-half million implied by the six hundred thousand fighting men that were so carefully enumerated in Moses’ time should have at least been equalled under the United Kingdom (cf. the similar expressions of populousness given in Deut. 1:10; 10:22; and 1 Kings 3:8; 4:20; and the muster of fully 180,000 warriors for its southern portion [Judah and Benjamin] when it divided, as stated in 1 Kings 12:11 as well as 2 Chron. 11:1).²⁶ So forty-four thousand for three of the twelve tribes is by no means disproportionate.

²¹ 21. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” pp. 46–47. And Myers says, “The Chronicle’s numbers are exaggerated” (*I Chronicles*, p. 159).

²² 22. Ellison, “I and II Chronicles,” p. 350.

²³ 23. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” p. 47.

²⁴ 24. *Ibid.*, p. 43. But it would be difficult to reinterpret this figure of 44,760 by Wenham’s usual approach, into “44 (commanders of) thousands and 7 (commanders of) hundreds,” for one is still left with the final sixty.

²⁵ 25. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁶ 26. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 34. Wenham appeals earlier (p. 33) to de Vaux’s objection (to the total of David’s fighting men given in 2 Sam. 24:9): “1,300,000 men of military age would imply at least five million inhabitants, which, for Palestine, would mean nearly twice as many people to the square mile as in the most thickly populated countries of modern Europe” (Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1: *Social Institutions* [New York: McGraw & Hill, 1961], p. 65). Yet de Vaux is building on a verse which may be understood alternatively as “1,300 specially trained warriors.” Even so, de Vaux grants a population of one million in Israel’s

Regarding “1,” “Shishak of Egypt came up with 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and people without number” (2 Chron. 12:3). Curtis and Madsen respond with cries of “exaggeration *f* of the magnifying character of the Jewish Midrash.”²⁷ Keil speaks more to the point of “numbers that are based only upon a rough estimate.”²⁸ But one should recall the factual list of Syrian forces documented in 1 Chronicles 19:4 (see “b” in the first article in this series), which included one thousand chariots, seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Syria, moreover, remained inferior to Egypt’s revived XXII Dynasty as it launched what Myers designates “a major operation *f* corroborated by archaeological discoveries.”²⁹

Regarding “s,” over a century later Amaziah struck down ten thousand Edomites and captured ten thousand others who were then thrown over a cliff (2 Chron. 25:11–12). At this point Myers expresses greater reservations: “A large number of Edomites were slain—[but] the numbers here *f* are greatly exaggerated.”³⁰ Keil, however, seems to have justified such figures by positing an extended campaign: “There were further battles; and in the numbers 10,000, manifestly the whole of the prisoners taken in the war, are comprehended.”³¹

Beyond these passages, which are listed as explainable, there yet remain nine points in Chronicles that involve large troop figures and that lack parallels elsewhere in the Old Testament, which may better be approached through one’s interpretation of the thousands concerned. It is the contexts themselves that suggest this. The Chronicler, for example, describes “e” (1 Chron. 12:24–37), the troops that came to Hebron to make David king. Twelve contingents appear that are counted in large numbers, ranging in the Masoretic text from three thousand (Benjamin) up to 120,000 (for the two and one-half tribes in Transjordan). The total comes to 340,800. Three contextual factors, however, are to be noted. (a) These are not ordinary soldiers; most receive some particular qualification, such as those “who bore shield and spear” (12:24), “mighty men of valor for war” (12:25), or “famous men in their fathers’ households” (12:30). (b) Among the thousands there also appear groups that are incongruously small, such as “Zadok, a young man mighty of valor, and of his father’s house twenty-two captains” (12:28),

less prosperous days 250 years later (*ibid.*, p. 66), and yet he still cannot handle Sennacherib’s deportation figures. Wenham too concedes that his own complex approach to 2 Samuel 24:9 involves some “textual manipulation” (“Large Numbers,” p. 34), and his reinterpretation of Israel’s Mosaic population entails charging the author of the Pentateuch with “uncomprehending editing” (*cf.* n. 33 below).

²⁷ 27. Curtis and Madsen, *The Books of Chronicles*, p. 371.

²⁸ 28. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, p. 348.

²⁹ 29. Myers, *II Chronicles*, p. 74.

³⁰ 30. *Ibid.*, p. 145. Wenham again appeals to the interpretation “10 (captains of) thousands,” suggesting “To have destroyed 20 of the enemy’s best troops would have been a satisfactory result” (“Large Numbers,” p. 51). Yet when he takes the figure of the three thousand slain Judeans in verse 13 at face value, one wonders why he should hesitate over the ten thousand Edomites, twice over, especially when they were confronted by three times the opposing force.

³¹ 31. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, p. 423.

and “Issachar, men who understood the times; their chiefs were two hundred” (12:32). (c) The passage continues by telling how David consulted “with the captains of the thousands and the hundreds” (13:1).

Wenham therefore concludes, “This originally represented an assembly of captains of hundreds and captains of thousands,”³² his point being that in the lists of numbers “thousand” may serve as a compressed form of the phrase, “leader of a thousand.” In the first reference, for instance, about the 6,800 sons of Judah, the words $\text{יִשְׁמְרֵנָה מֵאַלְפִים וְשֵׁשֶׁת אַלְפִים}$ may be interpreted to mean six colonels, who could lead one thousand each, and eight captains who could lead one hundred each, thus making a group of fourteen. The number of officers who gathered to make David king thus comes to 398.³³

In “n” (2 Chron. 14:9 [8, Heb.]) Zerah the Ethiopian came out against Judah “with an army of a million men and 300 chariots.” Questions arise, not simply over the former figure, which (with 1 Chron. 22:14) is the next to the largest in Chronicles, but also over the latter, which is incongruously small. Yet, as Wenham argues, “Absurdity suggests the likelihood that someone has been trying to transmit records faithfully.”³⁴ What the Masoretic text here transmits is “with an army of אַלְפֵי אַלְפִים , and it is possible that one’s interpretation of the word אַלֶּפֶת warrants further consideration. Its Hebrew verbal root אַלֶּפֶת (Akkadian, “be linked with”), as in Arabic, means “to become familiar with” (the piel is “to teach”). From this may arise the noun אַלֶּפֶת meaning “cattle,” either as familiar (tame)³⁵ or as existing in company (herded) (Deut. 7:13; Prov. 14:4; or Ps. 8:7 [8, Heb.] with its “sheep and אַלְפִים). Hence a second meaning arises, namely, the numeral “thousand,” and a third meaning is the term for the numerical “part of a tribe” (1 Sam. 10:19) (= חֵטֶף פַּחַח , v. 21). Yet also arising from this root is the noun אַלְפֵי meaning, “familiar, a confidant,”³⁶ and (developing out of אַלֶּפֶת , “leader of a thousand”), “a

³² 32. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” pp. 44–45.

³³ 33. Of the fourteen groups (eleven of the twelve tribes, not counting Reuben, but adding east Manasseh, Aaron, and Zadok), six have numbers with only thousands, and one has only hundreds; and six have both thousands and hundreds.

Thousands Hundreds 3182[Issachar (12:32)]5038 Naphtali, 1+37 (12:34)4012068714637208286337+ 38= 398 total in addition Zadok and his twenty-two kinsmen (12:28) are an unspecified twenty-three.

³⁴ 34. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” p. 19. “Paradoxically, absurdity and unintelligibility are often signs of genuineness” (ibid., p. 53).

³⁵ 35. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), p. 56; “used in tillage, subject to man” (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1907], p. 48). While the noun אַלֶּפֶת (“thousand”) could in fact be primitive, without verbal root (ibid., pp. 48–49) rather than the derivation of “numeral” from “herd, crowd” (Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, p. 57), the concluding derivation of “chief” from “thousand” remains acceptable in either case.

³⁶ 36. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, p. 54; cf. “tame, docile, Jer. 11:19” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 48).

chief” (Exod. 15:15). Wenham interprets this last meaning as, “officer, famous man, specially trained warrior,”³⁷ or more broadly, “professional soldiers who ‘drew sword,’ nearly synonymous with *gibbor*.”³⁸ The plural absolute, significantly, is written defectively, **דַּלְפִּיָּם** (Jer. 13:21³⁹), and hence is indistinguishable from the numeral “thousands” in an unpointed text. Zerah’s army may thus have included one thousand specially trained warriors, (**דַּלְפִּיָּם**) and three hundred chariots; but it was still routed before Asa’s outmanned force, which included three hundred specially armed (not three hundred thousand) spearmen from Judah and 280 specially armed (not 280,000) bowmen from Benjamin (2 Chron. 14:8 [7, Heb.]).⁴⁰ The largest figures in Chronicles (1 Chron. 21:5) may thus, similarly, refer to David’s census of 1,100 such professionals in all Israel.

The remaining military passages become similarly interpretable.

“c.” The Davidic tribal muster in 1 Chronicles 7 gives figures for three tribes. Issachar includes a clan with twenty-two “chiefs” (**רָאשֵׁי**) six hundred (men) (7:2). To read the numeral 22,600 is possible but less likely in the light of verse 3, which lists a subclan: “and *f* all five of them were head men,” and verse 4, which adds, “And with them [the five] were thirty-six **דַּלְפִּיָּם**, troops of the army for war, for they had many wives and sons. Thus “thirty-six thousand” would be a legitimate translation, but it would require them to have quite a few sons. The last large number for Issachar is again best interpreted as eighty-seven “chiefs” (7:5); for if all three figures (7:2, 4, 5) are read as “thousands,” the total of 145,600 mighty men of valor seems too high for the single tribe of Issachar. Benjamin’s three listed clans are then best taken as consisting of twenty-two “chiefs,” with thirty-four (men); twenty “chiefs,” with two hundred (men); and seventeen “chiefs,” with two hundred (men) (7:7, 9, 11). Asher (7:40) could have had twenty-six thousand “heads of fathers’ houses, choice and mighty men of valor,” but consistency with the previous data would suggest twenty-six “chiefs” here as well.

“i.” First Chronicles 27 enumerates David’s militia, “the [twelve] groups which came in and went out month by month” (27:1). The Chronicler’s emphasis rests on “the commanders of thousands and hundreds and their officers who served the king” (27:1). So while a total force of 288,000—organized in twelve divisions of twenty-four thousand men each—is not impossible (see “a” discussed earlier), an alternate translation, of “twelve groups of twenty-four ‘chief men’ each,” might be more probable. Negatively, this would relieve Jerusalem of forty-eight thousand men exchanging posts at the end of every month; and positively, as Wenham explains, “This would be a means whereby the king could keep in touch with his military leaders.”⁴¹

Abijah’s four hundred **דַּלְפִּיָּם**, “valiant warriors, chosen men,” met Jeroboam’s eight hundred and slew five hundred of them (2 Chron. 13:3, 17), not five hundred thousand. “q.”

³⁷ 37. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” pp. 27, 30.

³⁸ 38. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35.

³⁹ 39. This is the only occurrence; sometimes it is in the plural construct (Zech. 12:5–6) or the plural with a suffix (Gen. 26:30, with *plene* in the same verse).

⁴⁰ 40. As to why this interpretation was lost in both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, Wenham affirms, “The explanation must surely lie in the effects of two generations of complete disarmament during the Captivity, when the *‘alluph* as a military figure became completely unknown” (“Large Numbers,” p. 52).

⁴¹ 41. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Jehoshaphat's five groups of "valiant warriors" consisted respectively of 300, 280, 200, 200, and 180 specially trained leaders (17:14–18), totaling 1,160—not 1,160,000.

"r." Amaziah had three hundred chiefs (rather than three hundred thousand), "choice men, able to handle spear and shield," but he hired one hundred more from Israel (25:5–6).

"v." Second Chronicles 26:12 may well retain its traditional rendering, that under a powerful king like Uzziah, "the total number of the heads of the households, of valiant warriors, was 2,600." But 26:13 should probably continue, "And under their direction was an elite army of 305 מִלְפִּיָא and five hundred who could wage war with great power"; the idea of an elite army of 307,500 even under Uzziah would leave a considerably depleted manpower pool for the main body of the militia.

"w." Pekah slew in Judah 120 chiefs in one day, "all valiant men," and took captive of their brethren, two hundred מִלְפִּיָא, women, sons, and daughters (28:6, 8)—more plausible than two hundred thousand women, etc., of their brethren.

Measures

This concluding category of large numbers unique to Chronicles provides subjects to illustrate both of the latter two degrees of "acceptability," indicated earlier in Table A on pages 209–10, namely, "Explainable" and "Providential." "Explainable" describes two instances involving measures of capacity. "v." Second Chronicles 27:5 concerns an Ammonite tribute paid to Jotham in three successive years; and it includes these figures: ten thousand kors of wheat and ten thousand kors of barley, i.e., by dry measure, about sixty-five thousand bushels each.⁴² Myers concedes, "There is no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of these reports," but he adds, "The enormous amount of tribute is probably an exaggeration."⁴³ Of similar import, though double in figure, is "k" (2 Chron. 2:10) this time concerning an Israelite payment by Solomon to King Hiram's woodsmen, which included twenty-thousand kors of barley and twenty thousand baths of wine. The latter is a liquid measure of about five and one-half gallons, and gives a total for the wine of over one hundred thousand gallons. These represent, as Keil says, "considerable quantities,"⁴⁴ but not beyond the magnitude either of Solomon's resources or of the Temple project that he was financing. In fact, along with these uniquely mentioned measures of barley and wine the Chronicler lists corresponding quantities of wheat and oil, which do possess a parallel (in 1 Kings 5:11) whose greater magnitude justifies these large figures of capacity that appear in Chronicles.

"Providential" describes an element in history to which appeal has not so far been made. These involve measures of weight. "f." David's preparation of materials for the construction of God's Temple included, along with large but unspecified quantities of bronze, iron, stone, and timber, one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver (1 Chron. 22:14). Since one talent weighs seventy-five pounds, the total value in United States gold dollars is thus calculable at \$4,250,000,000,⁴⁵ but its equivalent in ancient purchasing power was far greater.

⁴² 42. Myers, *II Chronicles*, p. 156.

⁴³ 43. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁴ 44. C. F. Keil, *The Books of the King*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 61.

⁴⁵ 45. Myers, *I Chronicles*, p. 152.

“j.” The second measure enumerated is less, but still involves six large amounts (plus one smaller one). After Solomon’s accession, David and the leaders of Israel made an offering over and above all that the king had already provided (1 Chron. 29:3), and this consisted of three thousand talents of gold and seven thousand talents of silver from David to overlay the walls (29:4; Cf. 2 Chron. 3:8) and five thousand gold talents and ten thousand darics (= about 7,500 shekels, or an additional two and one-half talents), ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron from the national leaders (29:7). The gold and silver alone add up to \$200 million.

Wenham thus feels led to speak of “deliberate and glorious hyperbole”⁴⁶ and adds, “In spite of the fact that enormous quantities of gold and silver booty are mentioned with apparent sobriety in ancient sources, it would seem that 1, 2, or even 3 noughts ought to be taken from these figures.”⁴⁷ Yet Keil, who begins by calling the amounts “incredible,” and then seeks to understand, “as the round numbers show, only a general valuation,”⁴⁸ goes on to observe, “In the capitals of the Asiatic kingdoms of antiquity, enormous quantities of the precious metals were accumulated” (quoting the ancient documentation to which Wenham refers, e.g., how Cyrus obtained five hundred thousand talents of silver in his Asiatic campaigns), and ends up by affirming, “We cannot therefore regard the sums mentioned as incredible.”⁴⁹

The present writer would prefer to attribute the historical reliability of the eight large numbers in these two passages to the special providence of God, in bestowing on His servant David a weight of riches commensurate with their intended employment for the house of His glory. Such confidence at least consorts well with the validity that is attributable to the other 621 figures that appear in 1 and 2 Chronicles.

The claims so often repeated about impossible numbers in Chronicles simply are not true. Those who join with Jesus Christ in affirming the inerrancy of the Scriptures have no need to modify or redefine that doctrine because of numerical phenomena occurring within these inspired books.

Appendix Tabulation of the Numbers in Chronicles

Categories	With Old Testament Parallels	Without Old Testament Parallels
<i>Persons</i>	—	1 Chron. 4:5; 7:15
Wives (and concubines)		2 Chron. 11:21, ; 13:21; 24:3

⁴⁶ 46. Wenham, “Large Numbers,” p. 46.

⁴⁷ 47. Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁸ 48. Keil, *The Book of the Chronicles*, p. 246.

⁴⁹ 49. Ibid., pp. 247–48, quoting, e.g., Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 32.15 on Cyrus.

Sons (and daughters of listed kin)	1 Chron 1:19 (Gen. 10:25) 3:1, 2, 3, (2 Sam 2:3-5) 6:28 (1 Sam 8:2)	1 Chron. 2:3, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, ; 3:4, 5, 7, 15, 24; 4:27, 27; 5:13; 7:1, 3, 7; 8:1, 2, 38, 39; 9:41; 21:20; 23:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 19, 23; 24:23, ;25:3, 5; 26:2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 2 Chron. 11:21, ; 13:21,
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Troops Groups	1 Chron. 11:11 (2 Sam. 23:8) 11:12 (2 Sam. 23:9) 11:15, (2 Sam. 23:13) 11:18 (2 Sam. 23:16) 11:19 (2 Sam. 23:17) 11:20 (2 Sam. 23:18) 11:21 (2 Sam. 23:19) (2 Sam. 23:19) 11:24 (2 Sam. 23:22) 11:25, 25 (2 Sam. 23:23) 2 Chron. 23:1 (2 Kings 11:4) 23:9 (2 Kings 11:10) 23:14 (2 Kings 11:15) 23:20 (2 Kings 11:19)	1 Chron. 12:4, 4, 14, 14, 18, 20; 13:1, 1; 15:25; 26:26, 26; 27:1, 6, 2 (a division), 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 (divisional commanders); 28:1, 1; 29:6, 6 2 Chron. 1:2, 2; 17:14; 25:5, 5
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Totals	1 Chron. 19:7* (2 Sam. 10:6) 21:5*, (2 Sam. 24:4) 2 Chron. 1:14* (1 Kings 10:26) (1 Kings 4:26) 9:25* , 11:1* (1 Kings 12:11)	1 Chron. 4:42; 5:18*; 7:2*, 4*, 5*, 7*, 9*, 11*, 40*; 8:40; 11:42; 12:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 24*, 25*, 26*, 27*, 28, 29*, 30*, 31*, 32, 33*, 34*, 35*, 36*, 37*; 27:1*, 2*, 4*, 5*, 7*, 8*, 9*, 10*, 11*, 12*, 13*, 14*, 15* 2 Chron. 12:3*; 13:3*; 14:8*, 8*, 9*; 17:14*, 15*, 16*, 17*, 18*; 25:5*, 6*; 26:12*, 13*
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Captives (or slain)	1 Chron. 11:11 (2 Sam. 23:8) 11:20 (2 Sam. 23:18) 11:22 (2 Sam 23:20) 18:4*, (2 Sam. 8:4)	1 Chron. 5:21* 2 Chron. 13:17*; 25:12*, 13*; 28:6*, 8*
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	18:5* (2 Sam. 8:5) 18:12* (2 Sam. 8:13) 19:18*, (2 Sam. 10:18) 2 Chron. 25:11* (2 Kings 14:7)	
Population totals	1 Chron. 21:14* (2 Sam. 24:15) 2 Chron. 2:2*, (1 Kings 5:15) 2:18*, (1 Kings 5:15) 2:2*, 18* (1 Kings 5:16) 2:17* (cf. 1 Kings 5:15–16) 8:10 (1 Kings 9:23)	1 Chron. 9:6, 9, 13*, 22; 15:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; 16:38; 23:3*, 4*, 5*; 25:7; 26:8, 9, 11, 30*, 32*
Miscellaneous groupings	1 Chron. 17:21 (2 Sam. 7:23)(Nation) 2 Chron. 18:5 (1 Kings 22:6) (prophets) 2 Chron. 5:12; 26:17 (priests) 18:7 (1 Kings 22:8) (man)	1 Chron. 9:26 (gatekeepers); 23:11 (Levitical class); 24:4, 4, 6, 6 (priestly courses); 26:17, 17, 18, (gatekeepers)
<i>Things</i> Cities	1 Chron. 2:23 (Josh 13:30) 6:60 (Josh. 21:19) 6:61 (Josh 21:20) 6:62 (Josh 21:6) 6:63 (Josh 21:7)	1 Chron 2:22; 4:32
Tribute (or plunder)	2 Chron. 9:25, 200 shields (1 Kings 10:10) 9:16, 300 shields (1 Kings 10:11)	1 Chron. 5:21*, 2 Chron. 17:11*,
Sacrificial animals	2 Chron. 1:6 (1 Kings 3:4) 7:5* (1 Kings 8:63)	1 Chron. 15:26, ; 29:21, 21, 2 Chron. 13:9; 15:11*; 29:21, 32, 33*; 30:24*; 35:7*, 8*, 9*,

Temple objects	2 Chron. 3:10 (1 Kings 6:23) 2 Chron. 4:7, 7, 8, 8, 8, 8; 3:15 (1 Kings 7:15) 32:12 3:16 (1 Kings 7:20; cf. 7:42) 4:3, (1 Kings 7:24) 4:4, 4, (1 Kings 7:25) 4:6 (cf. 1 Kings 7:27) 4:6, (1 Kings 7:39) 4:12, (1 Kings 7:41) 4:13, 13 (1 Kings 7:42) 4:15, (1 Kings 7:44) 5:10 (1 Kings 8:9)
Other items	1 Chron. 18:4 (2 Sam. 8:4) 2 Chron. 35:24 20:6, , 6 (2 Sam. 21:20) 2 Chron. 9:18, (1 Kings 10:19) 9:19, (1 Kings 10:20) 33:5 (2 Kings 21:5) 34:32 (2 Kings 22:14)
<i>Measures</i> Lengths: cubits	2 Chron. 3:3, 3 (1 Kings 6:2) 1 Chron. 11:23 3:4 (1 Kings 6:3) 2 Chron. 3:4; 4:1, 1, 1; 6:13, 3:8, (1 Kings 6:20) 3:11 (cf. 1 Kings 6:25) 3:11, (1 Kings 6:24) 3:12, (1 Kings 6:25) 3:13 (cf. 1 Kings 6:25) 3:15 (1 Kings 7:15) 3:15 (1 Kings 7:16) 4:2, , (1 Kings 7:23) 25:23 (2 Kings 14:13)
Weight: talents	1 Chron. 20:2 (2 Sam 12:30) 1 Chron. 19:6; 22:14* ; 2 Chron. 8:18 (2 Kings 9:28) 29:4*, 7*, 9:9 (1 Kings 10:10) 2 Chron. 3:8; 25:6, 9; 27:5 9:13 (1 Kings 10:14) 36:3 (2 Kings 23:33)

shekels	1 Chron. 21:25 (2 Sam 24:24) 1 Chron. 29:7* (darics) 2 Chron. 1:17, 17 (1 Kings 10:24) 9:15 (1 Kings 10:16) 9:16 (cf. 1 Kings 10:17)	
Capacity	2 Chron. 2:10*, (1 Kings 5:11) (kor and bath) 4:5* (1 Kings 7:26) (bath)	2 Chron. 2:10*, (kor and bath); 27:5*, (kor)
<i>Situations</i>	1 Chron. 11:11 (2 Sam 23:8), occasions 16:15 (Ps. 105:8), generations 21:3 (2 Sam 24:3), times 21:10, (2 Sam 24:12), choices 2 Chron. 9:21 (1 Kings 9:22), frequency	1 Chron. 9:24 (directions), 11:21; 15:18; 16:5 (rank); 29:22 (frequency); 24:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18; 25:9, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 (lots) 2 Chron. 8:13 (feasts)
<i>Time</i> Reigns, in: Years	1 Chron. 3:4 (2 Sam. 5:5) — 3:4 (2 Sam 5:5) 29:27 (1 Kings 2:11) 2 Chron. 9:30 (1 Kings 11:42) 12:13 (1 Kings 14:21) 13:2 (1 Kings 15:2) 20:31 (1 Kings 22:42) 21:5 (2 Kings 8:17) 21:20 (2 Kings 8:17) 22:2 (2 Kings 8:26) 24:1 (2 Kings 12:2) 25:1 (2 Kings 14:2) 26:3 (2 Kings 15:2) 27:1 (2 Kings 15:31) 27:8 (2 Kings 15:31) 28:1 (2 Kings 16:2) 29:1 (2 Kings 18:2) 33:1 (2 Kings 21:1) 33:21 (2 Kings 31:19)	

	34:1 (2 Kings 22:1) 36:5 (2 Kings 23:36) 36:11 (2 Kings 24:18)	
Months	2 Chron. 36:2 (2 Kings 23:31) 36:9 (2 Kings 24:8)	—
Days	2 Chron. 36:9 (2 Kings 24:8)	—
Dates, in: Years	2 Chron 3:2 (1 Kings 6:1) 12:2 (1 Kings 14:25) 13:1 (1 Kings 15:1) 16:13 (1 Kings 15:10) 23:1 (1 Kings 11:4) 34:8 (1 Kings 22:3) 35:19 (1 Kings 23:23) 36:22 (Ezra 1:1)	1 Chron. 26:31 2 Chron. 15:10, 10; 16:1, 12; 17:7; 29:3; 34:3,
Months	2 Chron 3:2 (1 Kings 6:1) 5:3 (1 Kings 8:2) 7:10 (7th month = “ the feast,” 1 Kings 8:65)	2 Chron 15:10 2 Chron 29:3, 17; 30:2, 13, 15; 31:7, 7; 35:1
Days	2 Chron. 7:10 (1 Kings 8:66, 8th day of the feast)	2 Chron. 3:2; 7:9; 29:17, 17; 30:15; 35:1
Age (in years)	2 Chron. 12:13 (1 Kings 14:21) 20:31 (1 Kings 22:42) 21:5 (2 Kings 8:17) 21:20 (2 Kings 8:17) 22:2 (2 Kings 8:26) 24:1 (2 Kings 12:2) 25:1 (2 Kings 14:2) 26:1 (2 Kings 14:21)	1 Chron. 2:21; 23:3, 24, 27; 27:23 2 Chron. 24:15; 25:5; 31:16,17

26:3 (2 Kings 15:2)
 27:1 (2 Kings 15:31)
 27:8 (2 Kings 15:31)
 28:1 (2 Kings 16:2)
 29:1 (2 Kings 18:2)
 33:1 (2 Kings 21:1)
 33:21 (2 Kings 21:19)
 34:1 (2 Kings 22:1)
 36:2 (2 Kings 23:31)
 36:5 (2 Kings 23:36)
 36:9 (2 Kings 24:8)
 36:11 (2 Kings 24:18)

Other numbers:
 Years

1 Chron. *21:2* (2 Sam 24:13) 1 Chron. *11:17; 14:1; 21:19;*
 2 Chron. 8:1 (1 Kings 9:10) *27:5, 5; 28:6*
 9:13 (1 Kings 10:14)
9:13, 21 (1 Kings 10:22)
22:12 (2 Kings 11:3)
 25:25 (2 Kings 14:17)
 36:21 (Jer. 29:10)

Months

1 Chron. *13:14* (2 Sam 6:11) 1 Chron. *12:15; 27:2, 3, 4, 5,*
21:12 (2 Sam 34:13) *7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15*

Days

1 Chron. *10:12* (1 Sam 31:13) *1 Chron. 9:25; 12:39;*
11:11 (2 Sam 23:8) *2 Chron. 20:25, 26; 28:6;*
21:12 (2 Sam 24:13) *29:17; 30:21, 22, 23; 35:17*
 2 Chron. 7:8 (1 Kings 8:65)
 7:9 (1 Kings 8:65)
 7:9 (1 Kings 8:65)
10:5 (1 Kings 11:5)
10:12 (1 Kings 12:12)
10:12 (1 Kings 12:12)

Reference with asterisks indicate verses with numbers of one thousand or more.
 Italicized references indicate verses with numbers from one to ten.

References that are not italicized or have no asterisk indicate verses with numbers from eleven to one-thousand.¹

¹ [*Bibliotheca Sacra: A quarterly published by Dallas Theological Seminary.*](#) (1955–1995). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary.