

Forty And Two Thousand

Q. Following a lodge meeting at which we had heard an explanation of the Second Degree Tracing Board, a discussion arose as to the story of Jephtha's battle and the death of 'forty and two thousand' warriors. Some said the figure was 2,040 and others that it should be 42,000. Which is correct?

A. The King James 'Authorized Version' of the Bible (at Judges XII, 6) gives the number as 'forty and two thousand' and that is the source of some confusion, although it is a precise translation from the original Hebrew, with each word in its correct place. It is perhaps necessary to explain that it is not possible in Hebrew to say 'forty-two'; one could say 'two and forty' (as in German) or 'forty and two', but the 'and' must be there.

For the remainder of the argument, I quote from a recent Lodge News-letter by Bro. C. T. Holmes, Secretary of United Technical Lodge No. 8027:

The 1st Chapter of the Book of Numbers gives an unequivocal answer to this problem. The Lord commanded Moses to number each of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel 'every male from twenty years old and up-ward, all that were able to go forth to war'. Verse 21 says: 'Those that were numbered of them even of the tribe of Reuben were forty and six thousand and five hundred.' Verse 46 gives the final figures of all the tribes 'So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel. Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.'

The figures for each of the twelve tribes are given in verses 21 to 43, and the wording of the final total leaves no room for error, 603,550. That total can only be achieved when we calculate the census of the individual tribes by the same method as we use for the 42,000 in Jephtha's battle.

Finally, one hears a great deal of criticism, nowadays, of the New English Bible and it is only fair to add a word of praise. In its account of the slaughter of the Ephraimites (Judges XII, 6) it gives the figure in modern terms—'forty-two thousand'.