

The Census Is Born

The first U.S. census began in 1790, shortly after George Washington became president. Federal marshals and their assistants finished collecting the information on this day, August 1, the following year.

According to the Census Bureau, the government instructed the marshals to post their returns “at two of the most public places ... to remain for the inspection of all concerned.” The census counted 3.9 million people.

Today, a director who is nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate heads the Census Bureau, which Congress created in 1902. The bureau oversees 12 regional offices, plus processing and support facilities.

When God wanted to express His anger against Israel, he caused David to take a census (2 Samuel 24). Although God had earlier used a census to draft an army to conquer the Promised Land, at the time of David’s census Israel was a powerful nation at peace. As soon as he completed the census, David realized his sin and repented. God punished the nation with a plague that killed 70,000 people.

Many of us like to make lists, but we need to be careful what we number. If we take a census of our abilities and strengths or list what we have accomplished, we can become self-centered and our pride will keep us from depending on the Lord. If we take an inventory of our problems, we may become depressed.

The best thing is to count our blessings and what God has done for us. Since God “performs countless miracles” (Job 9:10), we will never get to the end of that list, but our mind will be focused in the right direction.

--Beecher Hunter