

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

8-11-21

Numbers 2

The Arrangement of the Tribal Camps - Verses 1-2

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ² "The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family."

2:2 The nation of Israel was organized according to tribes for several reasons. (1) It was an effective way to manage and govern a large group. (2) It made dividing the Promised Land easier. (3) It was part of their culture and heritage (people were not known by a last name, but by their family, clan, and tribe). (4) It made it easier to keep detailed genealogies, and genealogies were the only way to prove membership in God's chosen nation. (5) It made travel much more efficient. The people followed the tribe's standard (a kind of flag) and thus stayed together and kept from getting lost.

The Tribes Camped To The East Of The Tabernacle - Verses 3-9

³ On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard. The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁴ His division numbers 74,600. ⁵ The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁶ His division numbers 54,400. ⁷ The tribe of Zebulun will be next. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. ⁸ His division numbers 57,400. ⁹ All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, number 186,400. They will set out first.

2:3 On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies: Judah was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself. The tribes of Issachar and Zebulun followed in order after Judah. These tribes would order themselves after the standard (the banner or flag) of Judah, which was said to be a lion.

And Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be the leader of the children of Judah: God recognized a specifically called leader for the tribe of Judah (and for the other tribes following). The order and organization God called Israel to required leadership, with leaders both recognized by God and respected by the people.

2:9 One hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred: The total number of available soldiers among the eastward tribes was 186,400. These shall break camp first: There was an order to the encampment and the marching for the tribes. They were to move as an orderly army, not as a mob.

The Tribes Camped To The South Of The Tabernacle - Verses 10-16

¹⁰ On the south will be the divisions of the camp of Reuben under their standard. The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of Shedeur. ¹¹ His division numbers 46,500. ¹² The tribe of Simeon will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Simeon is Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ¹³ His division numbers 59,300. ¹⁴ The tribe of Gad will be next. The leader of the people of Gad is Eliasaph son of Deuel. ¹⁵ His division numbers 45,650. ¹⁶ All the men assigned to the camp of Reuben, according to their divisions, number 151,450. They will set out second.

2:10 On the south side shall be the standard of the forces with Reuben according to their armies: On the south side of the tabernacle Reuben was the first tribe, and set closest to the tabernacle itself. Then the tribes of Simeon and Gad followed in order. The tribes ordered themselves after the standard of Reuben, which was said to be a man.

2:16 One hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty: The total number of available soldiers among the southward tribes was 151,450.

The Tribe In The Middle, With The Tabernacle: Levi - Verse 17

¹⁷ Then the tent of meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. They will set out in the same order as they encamp, each in their own place under their standard.

2:17 With the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps: The priestly tribe was in the middle of the camps, closest to the tabernacle and surrounded by the other tribes.

b. So they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards: Apparently, this was not only the way Israel was to make their camp, but also the way they were to order their march. The taking of Canaan would not be accomplished by a mob, but by an organized and orderly group.

The Tribes Camped To The West Of The Tabernacle - Verses 18-24

¹⁸ On the west will be the divisions of the camp of Ephraim under their standard. The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of Ammihud. ¹⁹ His division numbers 40,500. ²⁰ The tribe of Manasseh will be next to them. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ²¹ His division numbers 32,200. ²² The tribe of Benjamin will be next. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideoni. ²³ His division numbers 35,400. ²⁴ All the men assigned to the camp of Ephraim, according to their divisions, number 108,100. They will set out third.

2:18 On the west side shall be the standard of the forces with Ephraim according to their armies: Ephraim was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself on the west side. Following the tribe of Ephraim were the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin. The tribes ordered themselves after the standard of Ephraim, which was said to be a calf.

2:24 One hundred and eight thousand one hundred; they shall be the third to break camp: The total number of available soldiers among the westward tribes was 108,100.

The Tribes Camped To The North Of The Tabernacle - Verses 25-31

²⁵ On the north will be the divisions of the camp of Dan under their standard. The leader of the people of Dan is Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶ His division numbers 62,700. ²⁷ The tribe of Asher will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Okran. ²⁸ His division numbers 41,500. ²⁹ The tribe of Naphtali will be next. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira son of Enan. ³⁰ His division numbers 53,400. ³¹ All the men assigned to the camp of Dan number 157,600. They will set out last, under their standards.

2:25 The standard of the forces with Dan shall be on the north side according to their armies: Dan was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself on the north side. Following the tribe of Dan were the tribes of Asher and Naphtali. The tribes ordered themselves after the standard of Dan, which was said to be an eagle.

2:31 All who were numbered of the forces with Dan, one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred: The total number of available soldiers among the northward tribes was 157,600.

Summary: Israel's Order Around The Tabernacle - Verses 32-34

³² These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All the men in the camps, by their divisions, number 603,550. ³³ The Levites, however, were not counted along with the other Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses. ³⁴ So the Israelites did everything the LORD commanded Moses; that is the way they encamped under their standards, and that is the way they set out, each of them with their clan and family.

2:32 God is a God of order; here, before Israel can take the Promised Land, He requires they order themselves also. Not only is it more efficient and useful, but it also simply more like God - ordered and organized.

There is a limit to what we can be and what we can do for the LORD without order and organization. It isn't that order and organization are requirements for progress in the Christian life; they are progress in the Christian life, becoming more like the LORD.

Nothing is accomplished in God's kingdom without order and organization. While it may seem so to us, it is only an illusion - behind the scenes, God is moving with utmost order and organization, though we cannot see it.

2:32-33 God orders things according to His wisdom, not ours. In the arrangement of the tribes, He did not place the largest tribes closest to the tabernacle (as if bigger was always better); Ephraim, the closest westward tribe, is the third smallest tribe. Nor did He place all the large tribes on the outward perimeter for greatest protection (Benjamin, the second smallest tribe, is on the outer perimeter). God always has order and organization, but it may not make sense to us.

Our resistance to God's order and organization is almost always the product of simple selfishness - wanting to do things our own way, instead of the LORD's. For slaves, it is simple - slaves are

always told what to do and don't need to be ordered and organized. But free men must be taught order and organization, and must submit to it.

2:32-33 Everything was positioned in relation to the presence of God, the tabernacle. God could have described where the tribe of Judah was in relation to the tribe of Dan, but He did not. The reference point was always God Himself.

It is hard to underestimate the trouble people get into in their walk with God because they position and measure themselves in reference to other people. God is to be our focus, not other people.

2:34 The tribes of Israel camped around four banners, which were said to be a lion, a man, a calf, and an eagle. We find the same four creatures surrounding the throne of God in Revelation.

The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. (Revelation 4:7)

"According to rabbinical tradition, the standard of Judah bore the figure of a lion, that of Reuben the likeness of a man or of a man's head, that of Ephraim the figure of an ox, and that of Dan the figure of an eagle."

God's order is never arbitrary, or just made up on a whim. It is after His heavenly pattern. We must always accept God's order and organization, even when we don't understand it.

2:34 This must have been one of the biggest campsites the world has ever seen! It would have taken about 12 square miles to set up tents for just the 600,000 fighting men—not to mention the women and children. Moses must have had a difficult time managing such a group. In the early stages of the journey and at Mount Sinai, the people were generally obedient to both God and Moses. But when the people left Mount Sinai and traveled across the rugged wilderness, they began to complain, grumble, and disobey. Soon problems erupted, and Moses could no longer effectively manage the Israelites. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers present a striking contrast between how much we can