

Message #3**Numbers 2:1-34**

A free-for-all, anything goes society is not of God and it will not be blessed of God ever. This is true of a nation, this is true of a church and this is true of an individual. If any nation or any church or any individual is to move forward for God into great blessings, there must be law and order and there must be organization. We need leaders who understand this and do it.

Now in an entity that God will bless, He sets the standard and His people are to follow it. Things are to be done His way, not our way. If you want God's blessings, then God must be at the center of everything. This is not just true for Israel, but also for the church. The Apostle Paul said, "But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" (I Cor. 14:40).

Over the years, I have had the privilege of setting up many camps in the mountains. When you are selecting a sight there are certain things you must keep in mind. You need a relatively flat spot for the tent. You need to think through restroom matters. You need to think through water supply. You need to think through a place to tie horses for the night and a place where they can graze during the day. To get a camp up like that you need preparation and organization.

Just imagine setting up a camp for 2-3 million people. Think about the logistics of that. Thomas Constable said that one scholar calculated that the quadrangle that would be formed by some 2 million Israelites would form a community of about twelve miles square. Each border would be twelve miles on the north, south, east and west (*Notes on Numbers*, p. 15). Now to house that many people, you need order and organization.

Fortunately, Moses did not have to plan this; God did. He knew what His people needed and He knew where He wanted each one to live. In chapter two, God spells that out.

The second chapter of the book of Numbers begins with an emphasis on the importance of God setting up a camp with worship in view. There is precise orderliness and specific physical detail as to how the camp was to be set up. As we move out of chapter 1 into chapter 2, there must have been a sense of real comradery in the nation, especially in its relationship with God.

The "tent of meeting" was up and it was to be right dead center in the middle of all of these tribes. Surrounding that tent were these Jewish military men of the different tribes. They were to be camped around it. Now that is important to see. Normally in a military set up, you place the King and the generals and the officers at the center of things.

In fact, according to R. K. Harrison, a contemporary of Moses at this time was the Egyptian Rameses II. He was on a campaign in Syria and he used to carry a large war tent that was for the King. It was guarded by the Egyptian soldiers who surrounded it and camped around it in a rectangular fashion (*Numbers*, p. 54). This was normal for all militaries.

There has never been a military structure that is designed to protect the Tabernacle of God. No military would say let's put a chapel in the middle of our structure and protect it so we can worship God. So what is described here in Numbers is important.

This was a time when the one thing that was to be protected the most was the sacredness of the Tabernacle of God. It was a reverent place, a special place and God wanted His military surrounding it and protecting it.

GOD IS TO BE AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING PERTAINING TO HIS PEOPLE AND HIS PEOPLE HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THE SACRED PROPERTY AND WORSHIP OF GOD.

This is a key lesson for any to learn; those who want the ultimate blessings of God must keep God at the center of everything in life.

That point is clearly seen in this text. God's people are to live their lives with God at the center of everything connected to them. However, there is always to be a realization that God is Holy and separate from even the best of His people. That point is seen in the camping arrangement of this camp.

Now we may recall that last time the men for war were numbered and there were 603,550 men that were calculated. Chapter 1 ended with the Levites camped immediately around the Tabernacle. It was their job to protect worship and take care of the things involved in it.

Verse 1 says that this was all ordered by the Word of the LORD. Moses is not the one coming up with this organization and structure. This is given by God. It is the LORD who is setting up and organizing this camp. God wants His people to know that He is sacred and set apart from everyone, but He also wants them to know that He is to be at the center of everything.

Now we may observe that this message from God included Aaron. We may recall that the first message was only to Moses (1:1). Moses is still the key man in charge (2:34) but for this assignment, Aaron was included. Since Aaron was in charge of priestly Tabernacle issues, it is clear that Aaron needed to be in on this organization of tribes surrounding the Tabernacle.

According to **verse 2** the sons of Israel and their families were to camp by a military standard division. They were to camp "around the tent of meeting at a distance." This military tent city would form a shield to the most sacred place in the world. The Tabernacle would be protected from every angle.

What we do see here is there was to be a major difference between where people lived and where people worshipped. The people had their tents for living, but this sacred Tent was for worshipping. That place of worship was to be viewed as a sacred place and this very housing order of God demanded that it was a very sacred place. It was not their house; it was God's house.

Each family or tribe was to fly a “standard” (degel) and a “banner” (otot), which was an identifiable flag or banner identifying the tribe and father’s household’s location. We are not sure what was on the banner.

It is possible they were different colors. Some suggest the colors were that of the priestly stones on the priest’s breastplate, each symbolizing a specific tribe (Exodus 28:17-21). It is also possible that the banner had the name of the family on it or some symbol or insignia on it, but the purpose was to specifically identify the tribe and family.

I think there is an important point to see here—corporate identity does not replace family or individual identity. These people were all part of corporate Israel, but they also were individuals who were part of a family or tribe. Each had their own place in the family and each was to know their own place and were to live where God wanted them to live. They were not to think more highly of themselves than they ought. They were to follow God’s Word at their appointed spot.

Now this banner or flag would accomplish some key things:

- 1) It would give the exact location of every tribe and family, thus keeping jealousy and rivalry to a minimum. You were there by appointment of God.
- 2) It would force families to stay together and keep God at the center of things.
- 3) It would show that everyone was willing to obey God and follow His Word.
- 4) It would show the order of movement when Israel was moving into the land.

God demanded this order and organization and this is a key to Him granting His blessings.

Now the four camping divisions from four compass points were as follows:

DIVISION #1 – Those camped on the east side. **2:3-9**

Now the east side is a place of prominence and preeminence. The Tabernacle faced east, which was the direction of the rising of the sun. We know that one day Jesus Christ will enter from the east. To be on the east side was a tremendous honor. There were to be three tribes camped on the east side of the Tabernacle:

East Side Tribe #1 - Tribe of Judah 2:3-4 = Jacob’s fourth son through Leah. Gen. 35:23

Judah was placed on the east side of the Tabernacle where the main entrance was located. Judah will be the tribe through whom Jesus Christ will come and of course He will be the King who will enter the east gate.

The number from Judah was 74,600 (**v. 4**). It was the largest of the military divisions. The military commander of Judah was Nahshon the son of Amminadab (**v. 3**). Now this military leader appears in the Messianic Lineage line of Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:20; Matt. 1:4). Judah was the leader of this three tribe division (**v. 9**).

East Side Tribe #2 - Tribe of Issachar 2:5-6 = Jacob's fifth son through Leah. Gen. 30:17-18

The commander of the sons of Issachar was Nethanel the son of Zuar (v. 5). The number from Issachar was 54,400.

East Side Tribe #3 - Tribe of Zebulun 2:7-8 = Jacob's sixth son through Leah. Gen. 30:19-20

The total number camped on the east side was 186,400 (v. 9). They were to move first. Now collectively these three tribes stationed along the east side of the Tabernacle would provide tremendous protection of the Tabernacle when stationed and when moved. When camp would break they would move out first (v. 9).

This certainly shows us how important it is to protect the main door entrance into a relationship with God.

DIVISION #2 – Those camped on the south side. **2:10-17**

On the south side of the tabernacle were camped:

South Side Tribe #1 - Tribe of Reuben. 2:10-11 = Jacob's first son through Leah. Gen. 29:32

Their leader was Elizur and their number was 46,500.

South Side Tribe #2 - Tribe of Simeon. 2:12-13 = Jacob's second son through Leah.
Gen. 29:33

Their leader was Shelumiel and their number was 59,300.

South Side Tribe #3 - Tribe of Gad. 2:14-15 = Jacob's first son through Zilpah.
(Leah's maidservant) Gen. 30:10-11

Their leader was Eliasaph and their number was 45,650.

The total number camped on the south side was 151,450 (v. 16). They were to move second.

According to **verse 17**, the Levites were to camp nearest the Tabernacle and when it came time to move it or relocate it, the line of march was to be in precisely this order.

DIVISION #3 – Those camped on the west side. **2:18-24**

On the west side of the Tabernacle were the Rachel tribes. This is where they were camped:

West Side Tribe #1 - Tribe of Ephraim 2:18-19 = First Grandson of Jacob's first born son of Rachel, Joseph. Gen. 35:24

Their leader was Elishama and their number was 40,500.

West Side Tribe #2 - Tribe of Manasseh 2:20-21 = Second Grandson of Jacob's first born son of Rachel, Joseph. Gen. 35:24

Their leader was Gamaliel and their number was 32,200.

West Side Tribe #3 - Tribe of Benjamin 2:22-23 = Jacob's second born son through Rachel. Gen. 35:24

Their leader was Abidan and their number was 35,400.

The total number camped on the west side were 108,100 (v. 24). They were to move third.

DIVISION #4 – Those camped on the north side. **2:25-31**

On the north side of the tabernacle were camped:

North Side Tribe #1 - Tribe of Dan 2:25-26 = Jacob's first son through Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant). Gen. 30:5-6

Their leader was Ahiezer and their number was 62,700.

North Side Tribe #2 - Tribe of Asher 2:27-28 = Jacob's second son through Zilpah (Leah's maidservant). Gen. 30:12-13

Their leader was Pagiel and their number was 41,500.

North Side Tribe #3 - Tribe of Naphtali 2:29-30 = Jacob's second son through Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant). Gen. 30:7-8

Their leader was Ahira and their number was 53,400.

The total number camped on the north side was 157,600 (v. 31). They were to move last.

So what we have are 186,400 on the east side; 151,450 on the south side; 108,100 on the west side and 157,600 on the north side.

According to **verse 32**, the total number of military men camped around the tabernacle area with their families was 603,550, which of course is identical with the military calculation of **Numbers 1:46**.

Verse 33 emphasizes the fact that the Levites were not numbered because they were the priesthood.

Now we do think there is an application to make from this. Those who have believed on Jesus Christ are part of the priesthood and we also are not looking for a land allotment. We are anticipating heaven. Furthermore, every believer today has direct access to God and does not live life at a distance.

Notice how the chapter ends in **verse 34**: “the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.” Everything was great. Everyone was obeying God and enjoying good things in life. Well what went wrong? We will see it in this book. The thing that went wrong is that the people stopped doing “all that the LORD commanded.”

APPLICATIONS:

- 1. Each person has a role to play in moving God’s work forward and God knows each person and where they fit into the whole.**
- 2. The more orderly and organized our lives are, the more God will use us and bless us. One person said, “It isn’t that order and organization are requirements for progress in the Christian life, they are progress in the Christian life.”**
- 3. Those who refuse to systematically study God’s Word with the desire to to obey God’s Word will never be led by God to His ultimate blessings for their lives.**
- 4. God must be kept at the center of everything if we are to experience His great blessings.**