

NUMBERS

Chapter 2

The Arrangement of the Tribal Camps

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ² “The Israelites are to camp around the Tent of Meeting some distance from it, each man under his standard with the banners of his family.” 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. 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. 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 his own place under his standard. 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. 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 Ocran. 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. ³² These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All those 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 with his clan and family.

2:1–34 This chapter is symmetrically structured: Summary command (vv. 1–2) Details of execution (vv. 3–33) Eastern camp (vv. 3–9) Southern camp (vv. 10–16) Tent and Levites (v. 17) Western camp (vv. 18–24) Northern camp (vv. 25–31) Summary totals (vv. 31–33) Summary conclusion (v. 34) (CSB)

In ch. 1 the nation is mustered, and the genealogical relationships are clarified. In ch. 2 the nation is put in structural order, and the line of march and place of encampment are established. The numbers of ch. 1 are given in a new pattern, and the same leaders are named here again. (CSB)

2:2 *some distance from it.* See 1:52–53. (CSB)

each man. Each was to know his exact position within the camp. (CSB)

standard ... banners. Each tribe had its banner, and each triad of tribes had its standard. Jewish tradition suggests that the tribal banners corresponded in color to the 12 stones in the breastpiece of the high priest (Ex 28:15–21). Tradition also holds that the standard of the triad led by Judah had the figure of a lion, that of Reuben the figure of a man, that of Ephraim the figure of an ox and that of Dan the figure of an eagle (see the four living creatures described by Eze 1:10; cf. Rev 4:7). But these traditions are not otherwise substantiated. See diagram of “Encampment of the Tribes of Israel”. (CSB)

Not specifically described. Rabbinic tradition associated a lion with the standard of Judah, a man with Reuben, an ox with Ephraim, and an eagle with Dan. (TLSB)

facing the tent. Tribes were stationed around the four sides of the tabernacle but did not contact it. Three divisions of Levites were closest to it, on three sides. Moses, Aaron, and his sons were on the fourth side (the front side on the east). (TLSB)

2:3–31 Matriarchal heritage ordered the tribes. Sons of Leah came first, on the east side (vv 3–9) and the south side (vv 10–13, 16). Zilpah’s son Gad was also on the south side (vv 14–16). Third, on the west side, were the sons of Rachel (vv 18–24). Last, on the north side, were the sons of Bilhah (vv 25–26, 29–31) and the other son of Zilpah, Asher (vv 27–28, 31). The Levites are mentioned after the first and last two groups to indicate their importance (vv 17, 33). (TLSB)

2:3–7 *Judah ... Issachar ... Zebulun.* The fourth, fifth and sixth sons of Jacob and Leah. It is somewhat surprising to have these three tribes first in the order of march, since Reuben is regularly noted as Jacob’s firstborn son (1:20). However, because of the failure of the older brothers (Reuben, Simeon and Levi; see Ge 49:3–7), Judah is granted pride of place among his brothers (Ge 49:8). Judah produced the royal line from which the Messiah came (Ge 49:10; Ru 4:18–21; Mt 1:1–16). (CSB)

2:9 *set out first.* As prophesied by Jacob (cf Gn 49:8), Judah became the lead tribe. (TLSB)

2:10–12 *Reuben ... Simeon.* The first and second sons of Jacob and Leah. (CSB)

2:14 *Gad*. The first son of Jacob and Zilpah (Leah's maidservant). Levi, Leah's third son, is not included with the divisions of the congregation. *Deuel*. See NIV text note. The Hebrew letters for *d* and *r* were easily confused by scribes (copyists) because of their similarity in form (see note on Ge 10:4). (CSB)

2:17 *Tent of Meeting*. Representing God's presence in the heart of the camp (see 1:1 and note). (CSB)

Levites. In the line of march, the Judah and Reuben triads would lead the community, then would come the tabernacle with the attendant protective hedge of Levites (see note on 1:53), and last would come the Ephraim and Dan triads. (CSB)

The Levites, sons of Leah, would follow the first group, the tribe of Judah (vv 3–9). (TLSB)

2:18–22 The Rachel tribes (Joseph and Benjamin) were on the west. Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim received a special blessing from their grandfather Jacob, but the younger son, Ephraim, was given precedence over Manasseh (Ge 48:5–20). Here, true to Jacob's words, Ephraim is ahead of Manasseh. Last comes Benjamin, the last son born to Jacob. (CSB)

2:25 *Dan*. The first son of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant. (CSB)

2:27 *Asher*. The second son of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant. (CSB)

2:29 *Naphtali*. The second son of Bilhah. (CSB)

2:32 *603,550*. See 1:46 and note. (CSB)

Each tribe's population is again added from vv 4–31. Though each triad of tribes had approximately the same manpower, the vanguard on the east side had the most soldiers (vv 3–9). (TLSB)

2:33 *Levites*. See notes on 1:47, 53. (CSB)

2:34 *did everything the LORD commanded Moses*. As in 1:54, these words of absolute compliance contrast with Israel's later folly. (CSB)

under their standards ... each with his clan and family. A major accomplishment for a people so numerous, so recently enslaved and more recently a mob in disarray. It may have been the orderliness of this encampment that led Balaam to say: "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!" (24:5). (CSB)

Ch 2 God's dwelling place is the center of Israelite life. Note that v 17, referring to the Levites and the movement of the tent of meeting, is the central verse of the 34 verses in ch 2. When encamped, the Israelites face the tent of meeting, showing the centrality of God's place for their lives. For today's believers, Christ dwells in our midst and incorporates us into His holy

tabernacle, the Church. • Lord, dwell among us by Your Word and Spirit, that we may keep You first in our lives and follow You always. Amen. (TLSB)