

NUMBERS

Chapter 2

Arrangement of the Camp

2 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, **2** “The people of Israel shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side. **3** Those to camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah by their companies, the chief of the people of Judah being Nahshon the son of Amminadab, **4** his company as listed being 74,600. **5** Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, the chief of the people of Issachar being Nethanel the son of Zuar, **6** his company as listed being 54,400. **7** Then the tribe of Zebulun, the chief of the people of Zebulun being Eliab the son of Helon, **8** his company as listed being 57,400. **9** All those listed of the camp of Judah, by their companies, were 186,400. They shall set out first on the march. **10** “On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben by their companies, the chief of the people of Reuben being Elizur the son of Shedeur, **11** his company as listed being 46,500. **12** And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon, the chief of the people of Simeon being Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, **13** his company as listed being 59,300. **14** Then the tribe of Gad, the chief of the people of Gad being Eliasaph the son of Reuel, **15** his company as listed being 45,650. **16** All those listed of the camp of Reuben, by their companies, were 151,450. They shall set out second. **17** “Then the tent of meeting shall set out, with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; as they camp, so shall they set out, each in position, standard by standard. **18** “On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim by their companies, the chief of the people of Ephraim being Elishama the son of Ammihud, **19** his company as listed being 40,500. **20** And next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh, the chief of the people of Manasseh being Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, **21** his company as listed being 32,200. **22** Then the tribe of Benjamin, the chief of the people of Benjamin being Abidan the son of Gideoni, **23** his company as listed being 35,400. **24** All those listed of the camp of Ephraim, by their companies, were 108,100. They shall set out third on the march. **25** “On the north side shall be the standard of the camp of Dan by their companies, the chief of the people of Dan being Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, **26** his company as listed being 62,700. **27** And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher, the chief of the people of Asher being Pagiel the son of Ochran, **28** his company as listed being 41,500. **29** Then the tribe of Naphtali, the chief of the people of Naphtali being Ahira the son of Enan, **30** his company as listed being 53,400. **31** All those listed of the camp of Dan were 157,600. They shall set out last, standard by standard.” **32** These are the people of Israel as listed by their fathers' houses. All those listed in the camps by their companies were 603,550. **33** But the Levites were not listed among the people of Israel, as the LORD commanded Moses. **34** Thus did the people of Israel. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, each one in his clan, according to his fathers' house.

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 *each*. 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*. 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)

2:34 *did...according to all that 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. 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)