



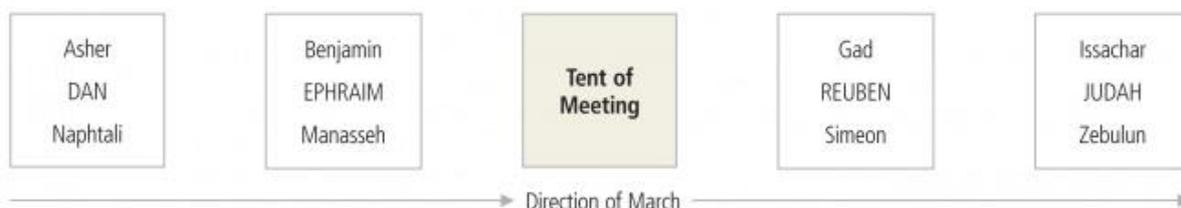
Numbers - Chapter Two

I Numbers 1:1-10:10 - Israel Prepares to Enter the Land (continues)

Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter prescribes how the camp was to be arranged and the order in which the tribes were to march. At the centre of the camp was the tabernacle. Rameses II, in his campaigns in Syria (1275-1270 BC), employed a similar strategic layout. The pharaoh, who claimed to be divine, had his large tent pitched in the centre of his military encampment.

Surrounding the tabernacle are the Levites: their arrangement is more closely described in Chapter 3. They guarded the sanctuary from intrusions by unauthorised laypeople. Beyond the Levites the lay tribes are encamped. The twelve tribes are divided into four groups of three. In premier position, east of the tabernacle camp, were Judah with Issachar and Zebulun (vv.2-9). Next in rank came the tribes camping to the south of the tabernacle, Reuben with Gad and Simeon (vv.10-16). After them on the west came Ephraim with Benjamin and Manasseh (vv.18-24). Finally, on the northern side of the tabernacle camp were Dan with Asher and Naphtali (vv.25-34). The same sequence was to be maintained on the march. The Judah group headed the march, followed by the Reuben group; and then followed the Levites carrying the tabernacle. After them came the Ephraim group of tribes, and the Dan group brought up the rear (v.31).



I.b Numbers 2:1-34 - The Order of Encampment and Marching

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ² The Israelites shall camp each in their respective regiments, under ensigns by their ancestral houses; they shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side.

Numbers 2:1-2

The Israelites shall camp each in their respective regiments. Israel had been on this Exodus journey for more than a year, and had assembled just about any way they had pleased. But now, ready to enter into the Promised Land, they had to take the next step in organisation: by ordering themselves.

It is not known what Israel's tribal ensigns or banners and standards looked like exactly, although Jewish tradition and the prophecies of Jacob in Genesis Chapter 49 provide an insight into their likely appearance. Judah's banner depicts a lion, Reuben's depicts a man, Ephraim's depicts a bull and Dan's depicts an eagle. This is similar to the description of the four living creatures: *<<Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle>>* (Revelation 4:6b-7). Other ancient and modern armies have banners, often referring to them as the colours. Moses saw beyond the traditional tribal flags following God's defeat of the Amalekites: *<<And Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner>>* (Exodus 17:15).

Facing, literally opposite, could also be translated 'at a distance from.' A gap had to be kept between the lay tribes and the tabernacle, yet it had also to be the focal point of the camp.

³ Those to camp on the east side towards the sunrise shall be of the regimental encampment of Judah by companies. The leader of the people of Judah shall be Nahshon son of Amminadab, ⁴ with a company as enrolled of seventy-four thousand six hundred. ⁵ Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar. The leader of the Issacharites shall be Nethanel son of Zuar, ⁶ with a company as enrolled of fifty-four thousand four hundred. ⁷ Then the tribe of Zebulun: The leader of the Zebulunites shall be Eliab son of Helon, ⁸ with a company as enrolled of fifty-seven thousand four hundred. ⁹ The total enrolment of

the camp of Judah, by companies, is one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred. They shall set out first on the march.

Numbers 2:3-9

Those to camp on the east side towards the sunrise shall be of the regimental encampment of Judah by companies. 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 banner or flag of Judah, which was believed to be a lion. This would be in line with Jacob's prophetic word over Judah: <<*Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness – who dares rouse him up?*>> (Genesis 49:9), and represents the description of Jesus: <<*Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals'*>> (Revelation 5:5).

The leader of the people of Judah shall be Nahshon son of Amminadab. God recognised a specifically called leader for the tribe of Judah and for the other tribes following them. The order and organisation God called Israel to required leadership, with leaders both recognised by God and respected by the people. As stated in Chapter One, Nahshon appears in the genealogies of Jesus, and thus it is right for the Messianic tribe to lead the way. The total number of available soldiers among the eastward tribes is one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred, making them by far the largest of the four groups of lay tribes.

They shall set out first on the march. 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.

¹⁰ On the south side shall be the regimental encampment of Reuben by companies. The leader of the Reubenites shall be Elizur son of Shedeur, ¹¹ with a company as enrolled of forty-six thousand five hundred. ¹² And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon. The leader of the Simeonites shall be Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, ¹³ with a company as enrolled of fifty-nine thousand three hundred. ¹⁴ Then the tribe of Gad: The leader of the Gadites shall be Eliasaph son of Reuel, ¹⁵ with a company as enrolled of forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty. ¹⁶ The total enrolment of the camp of Reuben, by companies, is one hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty. They shall set out second.

Numbers 2:10-16

On the south side shall be the regimental encampment of Reuben by companies. 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, Jacob's firstborn son: <<***Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigour, excelling in rank and excelling in power***>> (Genesis 49:3). The total number of available soldiers among the southward tribes is one hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty.

Reuel is elsewhere called Deuel (1:14). The letters D (ד) and R (ר) are easily confused in Hebrew script and it may be that a later transcription error was made. Deuel is most likely the correct version as it is also used in 7:42-47 and 10:20.

¹⁷ The tent of meeting, with the camp of the Levites, shall set out in the centre of the camps; they shall set out just as they camp, each in position, by their regiments.

Numbers 2:17

The tent of meeting, with the camp of the Levites, shall set out in the centre of the camps. The priestly tribe was in the centre of the camps, closest to the tabernacle and surrounded by the other tribes. They had the sole responsibility for the tabernacle and all its articles: <<***Rather you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the covenant, and over all its equipment, and over all that belongs to it; they are to carry the tabernacle and all its equipment, and they shall tend it, and shall camp around the tabernacle***>> (Numbers 1:50).

They shall set out just as they camp, each in position, by their regiments. 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 be by an organised and orderly group.

¹⁸ On the west side shall be the regimental encampment of Ephraim by companies. The leader of the people of Ephraim shall be Elishama son of Ammihud, ¹⁹ with a company as enrolled of forty thousand five hundred. ²⁰ Next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh. The leader of the people of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, ²¹ with a company as enrolled of thirty-two thousand two hundred. ²² Then the tribe of Benjamin: The leader of the Benjaminites shall be Abidan son of Gideoni, ²³ with a company as enrolled of thirty-five thousand four hundred. ²⁴ The total enrolment of the camp of Ephraim, by

companies, is one hundred and eight thousand one hundred. They shall set out third on the march.

Numbers 2:18-24

On the west side shall be the regimental encampment of Ephraim by companies. 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: <<*Indeed I heard Ephraim pleading: ‘You disciplined me, and I took the discipline; I was like a calf untrained. Bring me back, let me come back, for you are the Lord my God’*>> (Jeremiah 31:18).

The total number of available soldiers among the westward tribes is one hundred and eight thousand one hundred, the smallest of the four groups.

²⁵ On the north side shall be the regimental encampment of Dan by companies. The leader of the Danites shall be Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai, ²⁶ with a company as enrolled of sixty-two thousand seven hundred. ²⁷ Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher. The leader of the Asherites shall be Pagiel son of Ocran, ²⁸ with a company as enrolled of forty-one thousand five hundred. ²⁹ Then the tribe of Naphtali: The leader of the Naphtalites shall be Ahira son of Enan, ³⁰ with a company as enrolled of fifty-three thousand four hundred. ³¹ The total enrolment of the camp of Dan is one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred. They shall set out last, by companies.

Numbers 2:25-31

On the north side shall be the regimental encampment of Dan by companies. 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, although some believe it would have been a snake: <<*Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider falls backwards’*>> (Genesis 49:16-17).

The total number of available soldiers among the northward tribes is one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred. This is therefore the second largest group although and brings up the rear. However, it is not much larger than the group led by Reuben.

³² This was the enrolment of the Israelites by their ancestral houses; the total enrolment in the camps by their companies was six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty. ³³ Just as the Lord had commanded Moses, the Levites were not enrolled among the other Israelites. ³⁴ The Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses: They camped by regiments, and they set out the same way, everyone by clans, according to ancestral houses.

Numbers 2:32-34

This was the enrolment of the Israelites by their ancestral houses. The total number, **six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty**, of available soldiers is ordered around the tabernacle; this number excludes the tribe of Levi.

They camped by regiments, and they set out the same way, everyone by clans, according to ancestral houses. Each tribal group was arranged after the banners of their tribes, and they broke camp and marched in that same order. This structuring would have made logistics and communications much easier than simply allowing family groups to camp or march wherever they wanted to.



Israel in camp

Capital letters in the diagram indicate the lead tribe in each of the groups.

Both in camp and on the march, described in Numbers Chapter 10, the tabernacle, guarded by the Levites, is always at the centre as God is at the heart of the nation. The Judah group has pride of place in the camp and leads the nation on the march.