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The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el

2: 1-34

The camp of the twelve tribes of Isra'el DIG: Describe the order in which the tribes were placed in the camp. Was there any significance to that order? How does the camp of Isra'el compare to the camp of God? Why was the tribe of Judah so favored?

RELECT: The book of Numbers records 150 occurrences of ADONAI speaking to Moshe. How does God speak to you today? Do you think God is concerned about the everyday aspects of your life? Why? Why not? How much organization do you need in your life?



ADONAI said to Moses and Aaron His servants: The Israelites are to camp around the Tabernacle some distance from it, each man under his standard with the banners of his family (Numbers 2:1-2). It was important for **God's** army to be orderly and disciplined. Jewish tradition suggests that the **standard** for **the tribe of Judah** was a **lion**; the **standard** for **the tribe of Reuben** was **the face of a man**; the **standard** for **the tribe of Ephraim** was **an ox**; and the **standard** for **the tribe of Dan** was **an eagle**. These were the same as the faces of the cherubim that **Ezeki'el** saw in his vision during the Babylonian captivity (**Ezekiel 1:10**), and that **John** saw around the throne of **God** (**Revelation 4:6b-8**). So as far as the positioning of the standards are concerned, you would see the lion on **the east**, an ox on **the west**, an eagle on **the north** and the face of a man on **the south**. Like the New Jerusalem with three **gates** on each side (**Revelation 21:13**), there will be three **tribes** on each side of **the Tabernacle**.

The choice of **Judah** and **Ephraim** for the heads of encampments is fairly obvious in that those two houses represent the powerful houses of **Judah** and **Joseph**, recipients of the "rulership" and firstborn rights, respectively. Less obvious is the choice of **Reuben** and **Dan**. Perhaps **their** rank is also, in some measure, derived from the firstborn privilege. **Reuben** was the natural firstborn of **Jacob**, though **his** status as such was revoked (see the commentary on **Genesis**, [to see link click **Ik** - Reuben Slept with His Father's Concubine Bilhah](#)). **Dan** was the actual firstborn of **Rachel's** house, **the son** of the maidservant **Bilhah**.³³

To enter **the Tabernacle** you had to go through **the tribe of Judah**, because the entrance was on its eastern side. **On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard of a lion.** And we see in the book of **Revelation** that **Yeshua** is **the Lion of the tribe of Judah** (see the commentary on [Revelation Ce - The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David Has Triumphed](#)). **The lion** represents **His** strength, authority, and royalty. But it is also given to us that **He** would come from **the tribe of Judah**. **He** would be the son of David who would reign on the throne. In Solomon's porch there were six steps that led up to his throne. On each step were two lions, one on each side. There were twelve lions all together. This represented all **twelve tribes** under one king. This corresponds to the book of **Matthew** that pictures **Jesus** as **the King**. **The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab** who appears in later genealogies in the messianic line (**Ruth 4:20** and **Matthew 1:4**). **His division numbers 74,600 (Numbers 2:3-4).** **The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them.** **The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar.** **His division is 54,400 (Numbers 2:5-6).** **The tribe of Zebulun will be next.** **The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon.** **His division numbers 57,400 (Numbers 2:7-8).** **All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, number 186,400.** **The tribes** in this **division** represented the fourth, fifth and sixth sons of Leah. When **they** marched, the standard of **a lion** went **out first (Numbers 2:9).**

On the south were the divisions of the camp of **Reuben** under their standard of the **face of a man**. **Ezekiel** was standing on the Kebar River looking north when he saw the four living creatures and the Shechinah glory. They were coming out of the north, and that meant that the face of a man was facing south and would be **Rueben's standard (Ezekiel 1:4 and 10)**. This corresponds to the book of **Luke** that pictures **Yeshua as the Son of Man**. **The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of Shedeur.** **His division numbers 46,500 (Numbers 2:10-11).** **The tribe of Simeon will camp next to them.** **The leader of the people of Simeon is Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.** **His division numbers 59,300 (Numbers 2:12-13).** **The tribe of Gad will be next.** **The leader of the**

people of Gad is Eliasaph son of Deuel. His division numbers 45,650 (Numbers 2:14-15). All the men assigned to the camp of Reuben, according to their divisions, number 151,450. Reuben and Simeon were the first and second sons of Leah. Levi was the third son, but that **tribe** could not make up part of **the Reuben division** because of its religious duties. So **Gad**, the oldest son of Leah's handmaid, was aligned with **Reuben**. In the line of march, this **division set out second**, under **the face of a man** as its standard, behind **Judah** (Numbers 2:16).

Then the Tabernacle and the camp of **the Levites** will dwell in the middle of the twelve tribes of Isra'el (Numbers 2:17a). The tribe of Levi was divided into three families, under his three **sons, Gershon, Lohath and Merari**. Each had his own separate place of **encampment** around **the Tabernacle**, and to each was committed a specific responsibility. The **Merarites**, who encamped on the north, watched over, erected, and carried all the solid framework of **the Tabernacle**, the pillars of the surrounding courts, together with the sockets of silver and brass. The weight might have been as much as fifteen tons. The **Gershonites** pitched towards **the west**, and had under **their** care the curtains, hangings and coverings of **the Tabernacle** and court, which **they** also carried on **their** journeys. To the **Kohathites**, whose **camp** was **south**, were given the duty of carrying the seven pieces of the **Tabernacle** furniture. Thus, it was all distributed among these three families of **Levites**, and each family had its own responsibility.³⁴ This was the way **the tribes of Isra'el camped**, but in the line of march **they** followed **Reuben's** division.

EAST

Judah

Zebulun

Issachar

Asher

Simeon

Moshe, Aaron and the Priests

NORTH Dan Merarites the Tabernacle Kohathites
Reuben SOUTH

Gershonites

Naphtali

Gad

Benjamin

Manasseh

Ephraim

WEST

On the west were the divisions of the camp of **Ephraim** under their standard an ox. As the lion is the sign for the tribe of Judah, the ox is the sign for the tribe of Ephraim (Deuteronomy 33:13-17; Jeremiah 31:18; Hosea 10:11). In Solomon's temple there were twelve oxen sitting beneath a huge water tank called the sea. These twelve oxen were facing north, south, east and west. They represented Isra'el under the leadership of the tribe of Ephraim. Isra'el would soon be divided into two nations, the northern Kingdom and the southern Kingdom. The kings from the tribe of Ephraim would rule the northern Kingdom, and the kings from the tribe of Judah would lead the southern Kingdom. But the sign of the tribe of Ephraim was an ox. This corresponds to the book of Mark that pictures Yeshua as a Servant (Mark 10:45). The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of Ammihud. His division numbers 40,500 (Numbers 2:18-19). The tribe of Manasseh will be next to them. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. His division numbers 32,200 (Numbers 2:20-21). The tribe of Benjamin will be next. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideoni. His division numbers 35,400 (Numbers 2:22-23). All the men assigned to the camp of Ephraim, according to their divisions, number 108,100. These three tribes traced their ancestry to Jacob through his wife Rachael. In the line of march, they set out third and followed the Levites with the standard of an ox leading the way (Numbers 2:24).

On the north were the divisions of the camp of Dan, under their standard an eagle. Jacob had compared Dan to a serpent (Genesis 49:17), but that was changed later to an

eagle. **The leader of the people of Dan is Shiezer son of Ammishaddai. His division numbers 62,700 (Numbers 2:25-26). The tribe of Asher will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Ocran. His division numbers 62,700 (Numbers 2:27-28). The tribe of Naphtali will be next. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira, son of Enan. His division numbers 53,400 (Numbers 2:29-30). All the men assigned to the camp of Dan numbered 157,600. Dan and Naphtali were the sons of Rachel's handmaid, whereas, Asher was the second son of Leah's handmaid. In the line of march, they set out last, under their standard of an eagle (Numbers 2:31).**

These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All those in the camps, by their divisions, number 603,550 (Numbers 2:32). The Levites, however, were not counted along with the women and children, as God commanded Moses (Numbers 2:32-33). A certain rationale may be seen in the arrangement of **the tribes** on ancestral grounds, with the exception of **Asher**. But with the grouping of the Rachel **tribes** together and the elimination of Levi, there is hardly any other place for **Asher** to fit, so the overall pattern does appear to reflect maternal origins (see [Ak - The Numbering of the Tribes](#)).

So the Israelites did everything ADONAI commanded Moses; that is the way they encamped under their standards, and that is the way they set out, each with his own clan, family, and each under his own standard (Numbers 2:34; 2:17b). The order of the line of march was according to the following diagram, all parties retaining as nearly as possible the relative position of the encampment. In this anticipatory passage (see [Ac - Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Anticipatory Passages](#)) the fact that **the camp** traveled in the same formation at rest, anticipates the description of **the camp** in motion (see [Bn - Leaving Sinai: The grand procession of tribes and Levites](#)).³

Moses

Aaron and his sons

1. Judah

2. Issachar

3. Zebulun

Levites from the family of Gershon

*(with the curtains, hangings and coverings
on two wagons)*

Levites from the family of **Merari**
*(with the solid framework, silver and gold
sockets on four wagons)*

4. Reuben

5. Simeon

6. Gad

Levites of the family of **Kohath**
*(with the Tabernacle furniture on their
shoulders)*

7. Ephraim

8. Manasseh

9. Benjamin

10. Dan

11. Asher

12. Naphtali

The Camp of God: This organization of **the camp** teaches us about **God's** priorities. Three **tribes** were **camped to the east**, three to **the north**, three to **the south**, and three to **the west**. At the center of **the camp** of Isra'el was **the camp** of **the Levites**. At the center of **the camp** of **the Israelites** was **the Tabernacle**. Within **the Tabernacle** was **the Most Holy Place**; within **the Most Holy Place** was **the ark** of the Covenant; within **the ark** of the Covenant were **the Tablets of the Testimony**, in other words, **the Torah**.

Thus, **the Torah** is at the center of **Isra'el**.

In **John's Revelation**, he sees **the New Jerusalem** descend from **heaven**. The entire city is holy. It is **the camp** of **the Sh'khinah glory**. **The City** is accessed by **twelve gates**,

three on each side. Upon each **gate** is written one of **the tribal names**. It had a **great high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Isra'el**. There were **three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fu - A Great High Wall with Twelve Gates**). Therefore, **the camp of Isra'el** foreshadows **the New Jerusalem**, or perhaps **the New Jerusalem** is patterned after **the camp of Isra'el** in the wilderness. In either case, we see the obvious relationship between **Numbers 2** and **Revelation 21**. **The gates of the City of God** are accessed only by the names of **the tribes of Isra'el**. **They are the gates of His people.**³⁶

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **You** that **for nothing will be impossible with God (Luke 1:37)**. To redeem mankind and take them to heaven is a huge task, but for the Almighty Sovereign **God** of the universe, it is a sure victory. The gates of heaven will be open to all who love **Messiah** as their **Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-10)**. Thank **You** that I can live a life in absolute confidence that when this short earthly life is over, the gates of heaven will be open for me **(John 14:23)**. **Messiah** has conquered death and it is a joy that **He** is now in heaven preparing a place for me. **Yeshua** said: **Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you may also be (John 14:1-3)**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*