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The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el Numbers 2: 1-34



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).** 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 **Ezekiel** 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**.

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 **Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5; also see Genesis 49:8-10).** 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 tribe of Reuben under their standard of the **face of a man**. **Ezeki'el** 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 Reuben's standard (**Ezeki'el 1:4** and **10**). This corresponds to the book of **Luke** that pictures Jesus 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 tribe 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, was all distributed among these three families of **Levites**, and each family had its own responsibility.⁴⁷² 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 Levites
The Tabernacle

NORTH **Dan**
SOUTH

Reuben

Naphtali

Gad

Benjamin

Manasseh

Ephraim

WEST

On the west were the divisions of **the tribe 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 **standard of an ox** leading the way (Numbers 2:24).

On the north were the divisions of **the tribe 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 number 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.

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 pattern, all parties retaining as nearly as possible the relative position of the encampment.

1. **Judah**
2. **Issachar**
3. **Zebulun**
4. **Reuben**

5. Simeon

6. Gad

Moses

Aaron

Levites

(with the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders)

Levites of the family of Kohath

(with the Tabernacle furniture on their shoulders)

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)

7. Ephraim

8. Manasseh

9. Benjamin

10. Dan

11. Asher

12. Naphtali