

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (unedited by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 2:10-17

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue reading Numbers chapter 2, and today we will cover verses 10-17.

The Tabernacle served as the center of life and movement for the Israelite congregation in the wilderness. When the Israelites encamped, the twelve tribes were divided into four camps situated around the Tabernacle. Yesterday, we read about the Camp of Judah, which encamped to the east and included the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; these three tribes were all descendants of Jacob's sons by Leah. Although Rachel was the wife whom Jacob loved, Leah was the wife recognized by God and under His special blessing; she bore six sons for Jacob. Today, we will continue by reading about the three tribes that encamped to the south.

Verses 10-11: "On the south side shall be the standard of the forces with Reuben according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Reuben shall be Elizur the son of Shedeur. And his army was numbered at forty-six thousand five hundred."

Three tribes also encamped on the south side, forming a camp known as the Camp of Reuben. Reuben was originally Jacob's firstborn, but he lost his birthright due to his unrestrained passions. However, God still demonstrated abundant mercy; the tribe of Reuben was still tasked with guarding the south side of the Tabernacle, and they held the position of the lead tribe among the three guarding the south. Thus, it was called the Camp of Reuben and bore the flag of Reuben. According to Israelite tradition, the flag of the Camp of Reuben was that of a man. All people have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; yet, in God's mercy and grace, He has opened the door of

salvation for mankind. Those who have received grace and salvation can still encamp around the Tabernacle and march under a banner featuring a man, which is a way of exalting the grace of God.

The leader of the tribe of Reuben was Elizur, the son of Shedeur, and the number of men counted in the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.

Verses 12-13: "Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon: the leader of the children of Simeon shall be Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And his army was numbered at fifty-nine thousand three hundred."

Reuben and Simeon were the first and second sons Leah bore to Jacob. The name Reuben means "See, a son," and Simeon means "He who hears." Both names were chosen by Leah, reflecting her state of mind at the time. Because Leah was not favored, she cried out to God, and God gave her two sons in succession. Responding to God's grace, Leah said, "The Lord has surely looked on my affliction" and "Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved" (Genesis 29:32-33). Growing up in such a family background, the bond between these brothers must have been particularly harmonious, and being placed in the same camp when encamping allowed them to be of one mind in guarding the south side of the Tabernacle.

Here we see the wisdom of God; although God possesses absolute sovereignty in arranging the order of the camps, He still considers human needs in the actual implementation. Simeon had a cruel nature and was not easily submissive to others' management. Reuben was his older brother, and he was the one who understood him best and could empathize with him most; therefore, this arrangement was the most effective way to maintain the unity of the army. Shelumiel, the son of Zurishaddai, was the leader of the tribe of Simeon, and the number of men counted in the tribe of Simeon was 59,300, making it the most populous tribe within the Camp of Reuben.

Verses 14-15: "Then comes the tribe of Gad: the leader of the children of Gad shall be Eliasaph the son of Reuel. And his army was numbered at forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty."

Originally, according to the order of birth, the third tribe in the Camp of Reuben should have been Levi. However, the Levites were set apart to serve God and could not be numbered for military service; therefore, Gad, the first son born to Leah's handmaid Zilpah, was brought in to fill the vacancy left by the tribe of Levi.

Back then, when Rachel saw that Leah had borne four sons to Jacob, she became jealous and gave her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob; the sons Bilhah bore were credited to Rachel, and Bilhah bore two sons in this way. Leah followed suit and gave her own maidservant Zilpah to Jacob; the first son Zilpah bore was Gad. Leah said, "A troop comes!" (Genesis 30:11), and indeed, the name Gad means "a troop." In his prophecy over Gad in Genesis 49:19, Jacob said that though Gad would be beset by marauding bands, he would eventually triumph and pursue their heels. The tribe of Gad was valiant and skilled in battle, and they were able to submit to the leadership of Reuben. God's arrangement for the encampment was optimal. Eliasaph, the son of Reuel, was the leader of the children of Gad, and the number of men counted in the tribe of Gad was 45,650.

Verse 16: "All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Reuben were one hundred fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty. They shall be the second to set out."

The number of men counted in the Camp of Reuben totaled 151,450, and they encamped on the south side of the Tabernacle. Both Reuben and Simeon lost blessings due to flaws in their personal character. In truth, if we are honest about our own situations, do we not also often lose spiritual blessings because of our own weaknesses and failures? Therefore, as a

reminder, God arranged for the Camp of Reuben to guard the south side of the Tabernacle.

Why the south? The patriarchs of Israel, Abraham and Isaac, both went down to Egypt or Gerar due to famines in the land of Canaan; both Egypt and Gerar were to the south of the land of Israel. The south is a direction people choose when they cannot withstand trials. Stationing the Camp of Reuben to the south serves as a reminder not to repeat the failures of their ancestors; on the other hand, it also serves as a testimony and a protection for those who are weak, failed, and tempted to retreat. Under the provision of God's grace, tribes that have failed can still be numbered for war and station themselves on the south side of the Tabernacle, preventing temptation and seduction from approaching from the south.

When the Israelites set out, the Camp of Reuben was the second in the procession, following closely behind the Camp of Judah. When the Camp of Judah engaged the enemy head-on, the Camp of Reuben became an important hub for logistics and supplies, ensuring that the troops fighting at the front had no concerns about their rear.

Verse 17: "And the tabernacle of meeting shall advance with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; as they encamp, so they shall set out, each in his place, by their standards."

When the Israelites set out, the first group was the Camp of Judah, the second was the Camp of Reuben, and following close behind the Camp of Reuben was the Camp of the Levites. Levi was the tribe that served God, and the Levites had detailed divisions of labor to handle matters related to the Tabernacle. The details of the tribe of Levi will be described in chapters 3 and 4, so we will not expand on them here. When encamping, the Levites were to pitch their tents between the twelve tribes and the Tabernacle; we will also discuss how the tribe of Levi encamped later.

When the congregation set out, the Camp of the Levites was to be in the midst of the camps. In the tenth chapter of the Book of Numbers, when it mentions the Israelite congregation setting out, we will see that some Levites were behind the Camp of Judah, while others were behind the Camp of Reuben. In short, the members of the Camp of the Levites were interspersed among the various camps, so that whether the enemy attacked from the front or the rear, the Levites could be best protected. Because the Levites were set apart to serve God, their service maintained God's testimony, and the entire organization of the Israelites into an army was meant to guard that testimony.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is the same today; we must highly value the testimony of the church, especially cherishing those saints who serve the church. It is because of their service that the testimony of God can be exalted. The enemy is constantly using every means possible to find opportunities to destroy God's testimony; therefore, the saints in the church must be organized into a disciplined army for Christ, encamping around the church to protect the testimony of God.

When the church advances, those who serve God must be in the midst of the marching ranks, following the order arranged by God, so that God's testimony does not suffer any harm. The church is organized into an army not according to the pedigree of the saints, but according to their spiritual condition; only when they are appropriately organized under the sovereignty of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit can they maintain the unity of the army and protect the testimony of God.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. In the organization and encamping of the Israelites, we truly see Your wisdom. Although the Camp of Reuben had flaws, they were able to guard the south side of the Tabernacle under God's mercy and grace. This also reminds us how often we are weak and fail, yet You possess abundant mercy and grace. As long as we are willing to turn back, You can accept us; and in the provision of grace, we can also be strengthened to join the ranks of Jesus Christ's elite soldiers, becoming an

army that resists the intrusion of temptation and seduction into the church. For those saints who have failed and are weak, this is such good news. Please bless the church where I am, that it may also become a strong and shining testimony. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.