

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 2: 18-24

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. This week, we are going to read Numbers Chapter 2 and today we will read verses 18 to 24.

When the congregation of Israel camped, the Tabernacle stood at the center. The twelve tribes were divided into four camps, surrounding and guarding the Tabernacle on all sides. On the east side was the camp of Judah, consisting of the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. On the south side was the camp of Reuben, consisting of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. These six tribes on the east and south sides were descendants of Leah and Leah's maidservant Zilpah.

Following the arrangement clockwise, we come to the west side of the Tabernacle. The three tribes camped on the west side were all descendants of Rachel. There is profound spiritual significance in having Rachel's descendants guard the western side of the Tabernacle. Rachel was the wife whom Jacob loved from beginning to end. Although, in God's sovereign plan, Leah was the wife ordained for Jacob and was the one buried with him in the cave of Machpelah, it was Rachel whom Jacob deeply loved.

Because Jacob loved Rachel so deeply, that love became the opportunity through which God worked in Jacob's life. For Rachel's sake, Jacob willingly served Laban for fourteen years. During those fourteen years, we see Jacob transformed from a man who schemed against others into a man who was himself deceived and manipulated. Yet while enduring such treatment, Jacob experienced God's grace and became the father of eleven sons.

The eleventh son was Joseph, Rachel's firstborn. When Rachel gave birth to her second son, Benjamin—Jacob's twelfth son—she died in difficult childbirth. Jacob erected a pillar over Rachel's grave. This was the fourth pillar Jacob set up during

God's dealings in his life, and it was also the last. It signifies that Jacob no longer clung to his natural preferences and choices.

We see that when Jacob finally let go, God remembered his love for Rachel. Rachel's descendants became the three tribes assigned to guard the western side of the Tabernacle. The entrance to the Tabernacle was on the east side, while on the west side was the Most Holy Place. Within the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant—the Ark of God's testimony—which was the most central object in the entire Tabernacle. The Ark was also the place where God met with man.

Here we see an important spiritual principle. Our natural loves and personal preferences can hinder us from properly following God. But if, like Jacob, we refuse to stop following God, He will eventually lead us to lay aside our natural affections and choices. And when we surrender them, God remembers what we have given up for His sake. Whatever we relinquish for God, He replaces with Himself. Therefore, God ordained that Rachel's descendants would guard the very center of His purpose—the testimony of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, spiritual accounting is not measured by what we think we gain or lose. Rather, we often must first lose before we can truly gain. Jacob lost Rachel, yet afterward he gained the blessing that came through Rachel's descendants, especially through Joseph. Furthermore, God used Rachel's descendants to guard the Ark of God's testimony. With this understanding, we can now look at the three tribes that guarded the western side of the Tabernacle.

Verse 18-19: “On the west side shall be the standard of the forces with Ephraim according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud.” And his army was numbered at forty thousand five hundred.”

Joseph was Rachel's first son and Jacob's eleventh son. After Jacob lost Rachel, he deeply loved Joseph. That special love stirred up jealousy among Joseph's brothers,

who eventually sold him into Egypt. On the surface, Jacob appeared to have lost Joseph, but this was actually a blessing in disguise from God.

When famine later struck the land of Canaan, Joseph had become governor of Egypt and was able to save Jacob's entire family. The two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, Manasseh and Ephraim, became Jacob's sons, enabling Joseph to receive a double portion of the inheritance.

In Genesis 48, when Jacob blessed Manasseh and Ephraim, he prophesied that Ephraim, the younger son, would become greater than Manasseh, the firstborn. Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled in God's ordained arrangement of the camps. On the west side was the camp of Ephraim, consisting of the three tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin.

Jacob originally had twelve sons. Later, Joseph's two sons took Joseph's place among the tribes, giving Israel thirteen tribes in total. Since the tribe of Levi was set apart for the service of God, twelve tribes remained to be divided into four camps surrounding and guarding the Tabernacle.

Among Rachel's descendants, the tribe of Ephraim held the place of prominence. Therefore, the western camp was called the Camp of Ephraim and marched under Ephraim's banner. According to Israelite tradition, Ephraim's banner bore the image of an ox. The ox symbolizes diligent labor and service, and it also represents abundant blessing. This perfectly corresponds to Jacob's blessing upon Joseph. In Genesis 49:25, Jacob declared: "By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb."

The blessings promised to Joseph were inherited by Ephraim. If we look ahead five hundred years, after the Israelites entered the Promised Land and later established the kingdom of Israel under David, the kingdom was divided after the reign of Solomon into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. The northern kingdom consisted of ten tribes, led primarily by the tribe of Ephraim.

The prophet Hosea, whom God sent to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel, referred to Ephraim in Hosea 10:11, "Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain; But I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull a plow. Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods." Here Ephraim is compared to a trained young ox.

Again, in Hosea 4:16, "For Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn calf; Now the LORD will let them forage Like a lamb in open country." Here the kingdom of Israel, led by Ephraim, is compared to a stubborn calf. Thus, the symbol of Ephraim was the ox.

Ephraim was a blessed tribe whose banner was the ox. Elishama the son of Ammihud served as the leader of the Ephraimites, and the number of men counted in the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500.

Verse 20-21: "Next to him comes the tribe of Manasseh, and the leader of the children of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And his army was numbered at thirty-two thousand two hundred."

Adjacent to the tribe of Ephraim was the tribe of Manasseh. Ephraim and Manasseh were brothers, both sons whom Joseph had in Egypt.

In Genesis 48:15–16, Jacob blessed Joseph, saying: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

The blessing Jacob gave to Joseph was that Ephraim and Manasseh would bear Jacob's name and share in the blessings that God had given to Abraham and Isaac, the patriarchs. These two brothers received the blessing together, guarded the western side of the Tabernacle together, and shared in the responsibility of preserving God's testimony. This is truly a beautiful picture. The leader of the tribe of Manasseh was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. The number of men counted in the tribe was 32,200, making it the smallest tribe among the twelve in terms of military

enrollment. Although their number was small, it did not diminish their calling or their responsibility. Their position and function in God's arrangement remained just as important.

Verse 22-23: "Then comes the tribe of Benjamin, and the leader of the children of Benjamin shall be Abidan the son of Gideoni. And his army was numbered at thirty-five thousand four hundred."

Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son. Rachel died in childbirth while giving birth to him. Before she breathed her last, she looked upon the child in her arms. Feeling pity for him, knowing that he would lose a mother's love and care from the moment of his birth, she named him Ben-Oni, meaning "son of my sorrow" or "son of my affliction." By that time, Jacob had become a very mature man. On the one hand, he was grieving the imminent loss of Rachel. On the other hand, he could see God's blessing upon this child. Therefore, he immediately changed his name to Benjamin, meaning "son of the right hand."

Among Jacob's twelve sons, Benjamin was the only one whose name was given by Jacob himself. Benjamin's birth is also a type of Christ. In the history of humanity, only Christ was born as the true Son of Sorrows, for He was destined to become the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world and to bear the sins of all mankind. Later, through His death and resurrection, He became the Son of the Right Hand, ascending into heaven and sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

After Rachel died, she was buried at Ephrath, which later became Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born. After Jesus was born, King Herod realized that he had been deceived by the wise men from the East. He ordered the slaughter of all the boys two years old and under in Bethlehem and its surrounding districts. Matthew 2:18 quotes the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more."

Rachel came to be regarded as a mother of Israel. From a human perspective, a mother mourning for murdered children is naturally filled with sorrow. Yet from an eternal perspective, were not these slain infants among the first to welcome Christ and become martyrs for Him? In the millennial kingdom, they too will reign with Christ as “sons of the right hand.”

The three tribes guarding the western side of the Tabernacle were all descendants of Rachel. Jacob deeply loved Rachel, and the two sons born to her—Joseph and Benjamin—received exceedingly wonderful blessings. We have already considered Joseph's blessing, which was inherited by Ephraim and Manasseh. Let us now look at Jacob's blessing upon Benjamin.

In Genesis 49:27, Jacob declared: “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, And at night he shall divide the spoil.” This blessing indicates that Benjamin would be a courageous and warlike tribe. The leader of the tribe of Benjamin was Abidan the son of Gideon. The number of men counted in the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.

Verse 24: “All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Ephraim, one hundred and eight thousand one hundred—they shall be the third to break camp.”

The Camp of Ephraim consisted of three tribes: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The total number of fighting men counted in the entire Camp of Ephraim was 108,100, making it the smallest of the four camps in terms of population. Although their numbers were small, they fulfilled a role that none of the other camps could replace.

When the Israelites camped, they were assigned to guard the western side of the Tabernacle, the side closest to the Ark of God. When Israel journeyed forward, the Camp of Ephraim was to set out as the third division.

We know that the second division was the Camp of Reuben. Between the second and third divisions was the camp of the Levites, the tribe set apart for the service of God. The Camp of Ephraim followed immediately behind the Levites. Although the Camp of Ephraim was small in number, it bore the direct responsibility of protecting the Levites.

In terms of New Testament typology, the church is often comparatively small in number, yet it bears the responsibility of God's testimony. Therefore, smaller churches should not look down on themselves. They too carry God's testimony and are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting and supporting those who serve God among them.

Let us pray together: Lord, we truly acknowledge that Your ways are higher than our ways, and Your wisdom is higher than our wisdom. We confess that we all have our natural preferences and natural choices. Draw us closely to Yourself and help us to follow You. As we follow You, help us to lay aside our natural likes and dislikes, and to surrender our natural preferences and choices. Whatever we lay down for Your sake, You replace with Yourself. Enable us, like Jacob, to realize that only through experiencing loss can we truly gain. Through such experiences, make us able to bear responsibility and to guard Your testimony. Lord, bless the church to which I belong. Though our numbers may be small, You regard us as the apple of Your eye, and You have entrusted Your testimony to the church. Help us to value this trust and this calling, and to stand firmly for the sake of Your testimony. Bless the church to which I belong. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!