

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

Num. 2: 32-34

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 2. Today we read verses 32 to 34.

God spoke to Moses and Aaron, and they numbered the males of the twelve tribes, those twenty years old and above who were able to go out to war, and organized them into an army. Afterward, it detailed how these twelve tribes were to camp and how they were to march forward.

The tabernacle was the center of the Israelites' life and movement in the wilderness. When they camped, the camp of Judah was on the east side, which included the three tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The south side was guarded by the camp of Reuben, including the three tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. The west side was guarded by the camp of Ephraim, including the three tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The north side was guarded by the camp of Dan, including the three tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. These four camps surrounded the tabernacle for its protection.

When the Israelites marched forward, they also followed a set order. The camp of Judah led the way, the camp of Reuben followed, the camp of Ephraim came third, and the camp of Dan was last. The Levites, who served God, formed their own camp between the camp of Reuben and the camp of Ephraim.

When we come to Numbers chapter 10, when the Israelites were about to set out, there is a more detailed explanation of the arrangement of the Levite camp: according to the three major families of the tribe of Levi and their respective service duties, there was a more detailed division of labor. Some were to march after the camp of Judah, and others after the camp of Reuben. We will not go into the details here; we will explain them more fully when we read Numbers chapter 10.

Verse 32: “These are the ones who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers’ houses. All who were numbered according to their armies of the camps were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty.”

The total numbered of the army from the twelve tribes of Israel, according to their families and fathers’ houses, was 603,550. The total population of the Israelites should be three to four times the number of the army, about two million or more. Such a large number of people living and moving in the wilderness without resources was truly not easy. On the one hand, they had to completely rely on God’s gracious provision—He gave them manna and brought water out of the rock—so that they could survive. On the other hand, they also had to fully obey the order that God had arranged; otherwise, if everyone rushed forward to seize resources, there would be no way for them to survive at all.

In the order arranged by God, the most important thing was that the whole congregation of Israel must recognize this: the tabernacle was the center of their life and movement, and maintaining the testimony of the tabernacle was the most important mission of the Israelites and the most important responsibility of every individual. In today’s terms, the church should also be the center of the life and movement of every saved saint, and the most important duty of every saint is to maintain the testimony of the church. The church is originally the gathering of all the saints, and the testimony of the church is actually the testimony displayed in the daily life of every saint.

Dear brothers and sisters, I do not know how much weight the church occupies in your daily life. Are you aware that your reaction to everything—including in church life, in family life, and in workplace life—every reaction you have to every event is the testimony of the church? With this recognition, would you still dare to get angry easily? Would you still dare to act arbitrarily?

Verse 33: “But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses.”

The Levites were set apart to serve God and were not included in the number of those organized into the army; they belonged to God. The following Numbers chapters 3 and 4 will describe in detail the duties of the Levites and their division of labor. God's original intention was for every Israelite to come and serve God. Exodus 19:4-6 says this, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

God clearly revealed to Moses that the whole congregation of Israel were God's people and were to become a kingdom of priests for God; this was God's original will. However, in Exodus, during the incident of worshiping the golden calf, the Israelites fell and broke God's covenant, so that the duty of serving God fell to the tribe of Levi. But we must know that God's will will surely be fulfilled. When will it be fulfilled? Isaiah 61:5-6 says: "Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigner shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast." This describes the situation when Jesus comes again to establish the kingdom on earth.

Zechariah 8:22-23 gives an even clearer description: "Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'"

When Christ comes again, the Israelites will be priests for all nations, and all nations will come to God's temple to worship through the Israelites. We know that the Israelites are a type of the church, and God's will for the church is also very clear. 1 Peter 2:9 says this, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Peter tells us that every saint is a royal priest. However, the actual situation we see in the church today is the same as the condition of the Israelites after their fall—only a few are set apart to serve God. Of course, God is not satisfied with such a situation, yet God’s original will will surely be fulfilled. Therefore, in the last days, God calls the church to return to God’s original will, which is that all God’s people are priests.

Dear brothers and sisters, look at the condition of the church you are in. During every Sunday worship, how many saints participate in serving? Are all the saints who are willing to serve able to participate in serving? More importantly, ask yourself whether you are prepared to be a qualified priest to serve God. May God help us.

Verse 34: “Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers’ houses.”

God spoke to Moses and Aaron; Moses and Aaron, according to God’s command, organized the Israelites into an army and arranged the order for camping and marching. The Israelites were also very obedient and fully followed what Moses and Aaron had arranged. Everyone, according to their own families and fathers’ houses, gathered under the banner of their own camp. Whether camping or setting out, everything was done according to what God had commanded. In this way we have finished reading chapter 2.

We still have some time. I am willing to share two things with the saints: first, the twelve tribes of Israel; second, the banners of the four camps. My sharing will run through the entire Bible, helping us to see the consistency of the Bible from beginning to end, and to recognize that only by putting all the Scriptures together can we truly understand God’s will.

The origin of the twelve tribes of Israel is in Genesis. Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. In Genesis 49, Jacob blessed his twelve sons.

Jacob's blessings laid the foundation for the later history of these twelve tribes. God is truly the Ruler of history; the development of the twelve tribes in history completely followed Jacob's prophecies.

Before Jacob blessed his twelve sons, in Genesis 48, Jacob first blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, and adopted them as his own sons, so that Joseph could receive a double portion of the inheritance through these two sons. Ephraim and Manasseh replaced Joseph and became two tribes. So nominally, Jacob had thirteen sons, and thus Israel had thirteen tribes.

God foreknew that the Israelites could not keep God's covenant and would lose the position of the kingdom of priests, and the priestly duty would fall upon the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi was set apart to serve God and therefore was not numbered among the army. Thus, when the Israelites were numbered for the army, after removing the tribe of Levi, twelve tribes remained, divided into four camps surrounding the tabernacle on all sides to guard God's testimony. The Levites were to camp in the middle between these twelve tribes and the tabernacle, lest the Israelites trespass into the tabernacle and provoke God's anger.

Moses, because of his anger in the wilderness, struck the rock the second time and was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Before he died, Moses blessed the Israelites; this is recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 33. In Moses' blessings, the tribe of Simeon is the only one not mentioned. In Genesis 49:5-7, Jacob mentioned that Simeon and Levi were a pair of cruel brothers who must be scattered and dwell in the land of Israel. Later we see that the cruelty of the Levites was transformed into absolute devotion to God, making the tribe of Levi the tribe that serves God.

But the tribe of Simeon did not make a corresponding change. Instead, in Numbers 25, when the Israelites sinned and provoked God's anger, they did not repent but continued to sin. Numbers 25:14 says: "Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites." Zimri, a leader of a father's house in the tribe of Simeon, was killed because of his immorality. Therefore, the tribe of Simeon is not mentioned in Moses' blessings.

Later, Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land and divided the land as inheritance for each tribe; this is recorded in Joshua chapters 13 to 19. Because the tribe of Levi was the tribe that served God, they did not receive land as inheritance but were scattered among the forty-eight cities in the land of Israel, so that they could help the Israelites worship God and offer sacrifices. The remaining twelve tribes each received their own inheritance.

Later, David established the kingdom of Israel in the Promised Land, and this kingdom split into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel after King Solomon. The southern kingdom of Judah included the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, while the northern kingdom of Israel included the remaining ten tribes. The tribe of Levi was still set apart to serve God. King Jeroboam of Israel set up other worship centers in Dan and Bethel, and made the Israelites go to Dan to worship the golden calves, and appointed priests who were not from the tribe of Levi; this caused the Israelites to fall into the snare of sin.

Later, after the kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire, the ten tribes of the north were taken captive to Assyria, and these ten tribes seemed to disappear from history. Later, the southern kingdom of Judah was also destroyed by the Babylonian Empire, and the Jews were taken captive to Babylon. During the Persian Empire, after the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation were fulfilled, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple; this brought about three returns of the Israelites.

Among the returning people, the tribe of Judah was the main one, together with a small number of Levites. These returning remnant paved the way for the birth of Jesus Christ, so that God's plan of redemption could be completed through Jesus' crucifixion on the cross and His resurrection and ascension. This opened the New Testament era.

However, God has not forgotten the covenant He made with the ancestors of Israel. It was not until the end of the age, before the great tribulation comes, that God will send an angel to seal the twelve tribes of Israel. The names of these twelve tribes are recorded in Revelation 7:4-8. However, if we look carefully, the tribe of Dan is

not among them; perhaps because Dan led the Israelites into the snare of idolatry, it will be repeated again at the end of the age.

Yet God is still full of mercy and grace. After Christ comes again, Israel will become priests for all peoples. In Ezekiel 48:31-34, it describes that the holy city Jerusalem has twelve gates, and the gates are to be named after the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve tribes here are the descendants of Jacob's original twelve sons, with Ephraim and Manasseh combined to become the tribe of Joseph.

This should also be the situation of the holy city Jerusalem described in Revelation 21:12-13: The city "had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." In eternity, the twelve tribes of Israel will become the entrances to the holy city.

The twelve gates are twelve pearls, because Christ came from Israel. We know that a pearl is formed when an oyster is hurt by a grain of sand and secretes the juice of life, wrapping the sand layer by layer. In the same way, Christ was hurt by man's sin and also secreted the juice of life, wrapping people layer by layer, making them holy so they can enter the holy city. It turns out that the twelve tribes of Israel will also become the entrances for New Testament saints to enter the holy city through Christ.

We have seen the development of the twelve tribes throughout the entire Bible; now let us look at the banners of the four camps. Earlier we said that the camp of Judah had the lion, the camp of Reuben had the man, the camp of Ephraim had the ox, and the camp of Dan had the eagle. In Ezekiel chapter 1, the prophet Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon; by the river Chebar he saw a vision that showed the likeness of four living creatures. Ezekiel 1:10: "As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle." Lion, man, ox, and eagle correspond exactly to the four side camp banners. The four living creatures typify all the creatures God created: the lion is

the king of beasts, man has the image and likeness of God, the ox is the king of livestock, and the eagle is the king of birds.

The four living creatures typify all the creatures God created. However, when man fell and sin entered the world through one man, all the creatures God created were subjected to futility and fell into vanity. Paul says in Romans 8:20-21: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Therefore, all created things are eagerly waiting for the sons of God to be revealed in glory.

Since man has fallen and cannot save himself, God sent His only begotten beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to come to earth to solve the problem of sin for man. The details of Jesus’ ministry on earth are recorded in the four Gospels of the New Testament. Because Christ’s redemption is for all created things, the Gospel of Matthew describes Christ as the King, the Lion of Judah. The Gospel of Mark describes Christ as serving people like an ox and giving His life as a ransom for many. The Gospel of Luke describes Christ as the perfect man with perfect humanity. The Gospel of John describes Christ as God, like an eagle with transcendent power, overcoming the powers of Hades and death. The redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ can meet the needs of all created things.

After Jesus Christ died and rose again, He ascended to the heights. Revelation chapters 4 and 5 describe the scene in heaven when Christ ascended. We see the Father God sitting on the throne, and around the throne are four living creatures. Revelation 4:7 records: “The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.” Here again we see lion, ox, man, and eagle, which correspond to the four side camp banners in Numbers and also correspond to the Christ described in the four Gospels of the New Testament. We also see the Lamb standing before the throne, as though it had been slain, yet it is the Lion of Judah—that is Jesus Christ.

As a result, we see the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and all the angels singing loudly. In Revelation 5:12-13: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

Dear brothers and sisters, the entire Bible is coherent from beginning to end. As early as in Numbers, when the Israelites were organized into an army and divided into four camps, the banners of these four camps already foretold in advance that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. He is the Lion of Judah, He is the diligent ox who serves, He is the perfect man, and He is also the transcendent eagle. The redemption He accomplished can meet the needs of all created things.

In heaven, He has already received glory. Today on earth, the church still needs to continue the ministry that Jesus Christ carried out on earth, just as Romans 11:25-26 says, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved. Then Christ will return to take the church as His bride.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christ has already completed what He did. Today the saints in the church must, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, spread the gospel to the ends of the earth, so that all who belong to God can return to God's house, and the church can also return to God's original will. When the bride has made herself ready, that will be the time for Christ's return.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Through reading about the camping and marching of the twelve tribes of Israel in Numbers, thank You for speaking to the New Testament church through the Old Testament. In the church we must also follow the order arranged by God: Christ is the head of the church, and the church is the body of Christ. Only when every member receives the command from the Head and lives and acts accordingly can the testimony of the church be manifested. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.