

# OpenTheo

## Numbers 2

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The tribes ordered around the tabernacle.

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## Transcript

Numbers chapter 2. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, The people of Israel shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side. Those to camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah by their companies, the chief of the people of Judah being Nashar and the son of Aminadab, his company as listed being 74,600.

Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, the chief of the people of Issachar being Nethanel the son of Zuhar, his company as listed being 54,400. Then the tribe of Zebulun, the chief of the people of Zebulun being Eliab the son of Helan, his company as listed being 57,400. All those listed of the camp of Judah by their companies was 186,400.

They shall set out first on the march. On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben by their companies, the chief of the people of Reuben being Eliza the son of Shedyah, his company as listed being 46,500. And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon, the chief of the people of Simeon being Shalumiel the son of

Zerushadai, his company as listed being 59,300.

Then the tribe of Gad, the chief of the people of Gad being Eliasaf the son of Reuel, his company as listed being 45,650. All those listed of the camp of Reuben by their companies were 151,450. They shall set out second.

Then the Tent and Meeting shall set out with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps. As they camp, so shall they set out, each in position standard by standard. On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim by their companies, the chief of the people of Ephraim being Elisha the son of Amihud, his company as listed being 40,500.

And next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh, the chief of the people of Manasseh being Gamaliel the son of Peddasa, his company as listed being 32,200. Then the tribe of Benjamin, the chief of the people of Benjamin being Abidin the son of Gidionai, his company as listed being 35,400. All those listed of the camp of Ephraim by their companies were 108,100.

They shall set out third on the march. On the north side shall be the standard of the camp of Dan by their companies, the chief of the people of Dan being Ahaiza the son of Amishadai, his company as listed being 62,700. And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher, the chief of the people of Asher being Pagiel the son of Okran, his company as listed being 41,500.

Then the tribe of Naphtali, the chief of the people of Naphtali being Ahira the son of Inan, his company as listed being 53,400. All those listed of the camp of Dan were 157,600. They shall set out last standard by standard.

These are the people of Israel as listed by their father's houses. All those listed in the camps by their companies were 603,550. But the Levites were not listed among the people of Israel as the Lord commanded Moses.

Thus did the people of Israel, according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, each one in his clan according to his father's house. Having been numbered in Numbers chapter 1, in Numbers chapter 2 the tribes of Israel are arrayed around the tabernacle. We have already considered the possibility of astral or heavenly symbolism in the numbers of Numbers chapter 1. And when we consider the order of the tabernacle, it could be likened to the sun with constellations around it.

In the tabernacle and the gathering of Israel around it, we have a correspondence with the heavenly temple. In being arrayed around the tabernacle in such a way, Israel is being brought up to participate in this higher order. It is not just the tabernacle in their midst that is of great significance.

It's the whole camp. Around the 13th century BC, the Egyptian army under Ramses II adopted the formation of the military camp around the king's tent. Gordon Wenham notes the similarity between this formation and the formation of the camp of Israel.

The camp here is divided into four groups. The first group consists of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. These are all tribes of Leah.

The second group, Reuben, Simeon and Gad, are descended from Leah and Zilpah. The third group, Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, are all Rachel tribes. The fourth group, Dan, Asher and Naphtali, are from Bilhah and Zilpah.

There are the same clusters of three in chapter 1 verses 20 to 42. But the order there is South, East, West, North, rather than East, South, West, North, as we have in this chapter. This isn't the only time in scripture where we have attention paid to the ordering of gates and the ordering of the tribes.

Such attention is especially noteworthy in symbolic passages, where it seems likely that there is some import to the order in which the tribes are listed. We have such a list in Ezekiel chapter 48 verses 30 to 35. Once again we see some sort of loose maternal clustering of the tribes.

David Chilton suggests that we have an implicit ordering of the tribes in the book of Revelation as well on the gates. Revelation chapter 7 verses 4 to 8 gives the order of the tribes in the 144,000 sealed persons. In Revelation chapter 21 verses 12 to 13 we are told that the city had a great high wall with 12 gates and at the gates 12 angels.

And on the gates the names of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed. On the East three gates, on the North three gates, on the South three gates and on the West three gates. If we put these passages together we can order the tribes around the city in the order that their names are given in Revelation chapter 7. From the East to the North, from the North to the West, from the East to the South and from the South to the West.

This yields an order in which Judah, Reuben, Simeon are together. The senior Leah tribes, Gad, Asher and Naphtali are together. The hand made tribes, Levi, Issachar and Zebulun, junior Leah tribes are together.

And then Manasseh, Joseph and Benjamin are together. All tribes of Rachel. James Jordan and others have seen connection between the tribes and the signs of the Zodiac.

Judah is connected of course to the lion. He is described as a lion's cub in Genesis chapter 49 verse 9. That would be Leo. Reuben corresponds with the water carrying man.

He is described as a man who is unstable as water in Genesis chapter 49 verse 4. That would be Aquarius. Ephraim with his brother is spoken of as the first born bull in

Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 17. That would connect with the bull and with Taurus.

Dan is spoken of as the serpent. A serpent in the way in Genesis chapter 49 verse 17. That would connect him with Scorpio which can be seen as an eagle, a serpent or a scorpion.

More interestingly this also reminds us of Ezekiel chapter 1 verses 4 to 10. Where we have the description of the chariot vision of Ezekiel. The four heads and the four soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot and they sparkle like burnished bronze.

Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands and the four had their faces and their wings thus. Their wings touched one another. Each of them went straight forward without turning as they went.

As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side. The four had the face of an ox on the left side and the four had the face of an eagle.

The throne chariot and the living creatures seem to come from the north. And the face that's facing the prophet seems to be that of the human being. This would make the man's face the south facing countenance of the cherubim.

The lion on the right side would be facing east, the ox would be facing towards the west and then the eagle would be facing back towards the north. If we rightly identified the tribes with the zodiacal signs and their symbols. Judah with the lion, Reuben with the man, Ephraim with the bull and Dan with the serpent or eagle.

Then the order of the faces in the four cardinal directions in the desert camp corresponds with the order of the cherubim or living creatures in the vision that Ezekiel has of the lord's chariot throne. Once again this would underline the fact that the earthly tabernacle mirrors in some sense the heavenly temple. As we have already seen possible connections between the numbering of Israel and calendrical symbolism.

Perhaps the possibility of such a connection should not so surprise us. We should however note that the association of the tribes with these particular zodiacal signs, one that many have argued for, does not actually yield the typical ordering of the signs of the zodiac around the camp. A question to consider, where else in scripture might we have allusions to the signs of the zodiac? How can we understand such references without falling prey to the superstitions of astrology?