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## NUMBERS 2

### Numbers Series

Turn in your Bibles with me to Numbers 2. At Calvary Chapel we look at the Bible verse by verse, recognizing that any part of the Bible can offer us with teaching in order to move forward. What we'd like to do is allow the 10-14 year olds to go ahead and go off if you'd like to be in your class. The rest of you are opening your Bibles to Numbers 2.

Every part of scripture offers us applications for our own lives. In the story here in Numbers 2 we see some very important things about God's instructions to the people. You can tell a lot about a person by the kind of instructions that they give.

Sometime back I was at the playground with my grandchildren and I was listening to the people at the playground talking. I'm sure one mom must have said about ten times a minute, "Be careful. Watch out. Be careful. Watch out." Every time you'd turn around that's all she was saying. "Be careful. Watch out." Obviously she values safety. We can learn a lot about her by that. Another parent saying, "Go ahead. You can do it," valuing the sense of go ahead and try things. You might get hurt, but it's okay. So I think we can learn a lot about people by the kind of instructions that we give.

We can learn about God a little bit more by the instructions He's giving in Numbers 2 about how the people are to camp and how they are to march.

We started Numbers 1 last week. If you didn't get a chance to listen to it, you can listen to the introduction of the book of Numbers of chapter 1 on the web.

Now we're going to open our Bibles to Numbers 2:1. *The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: "The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family."* So don't get too close to the tent of meeting is what he's saying.

That makes just a statement about what God is teaching them about how He is separate, how He's holy, how He's different. Sometimes we get the impression that God is just like this only He's bigger. He's just like me, only He's bigger. He is not like me. He is completely different than me. He's a completely different entity. He's totally different.

The people need to understand don't get too close to the presence of God there at the tabernacle. He's teaching them something about the separateness, the holiness of God.

Now in the New Testament we emphasize a lot of the fatherness of God, which emphasizes closeness. We talk about God's grace and we talk about a lot of good theology that helps us. But let's not forget that the God of the New Testament is the same God of the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament, as we talk about it we get to see His character is the holiness, the wrath, the justice of God is emphasized.

So don't get too close to this tabernacle. I think we need to have and we need to teach our children about respect for God and who He is. There's a respect that we have for the waves of the ocean. There's a respect that we have for God and His awesomeness and His power and His holiness.

I like to teach kids about how we take care of our Bibles. We don't just throw our Bibles around because they represent something. It's not the paper and the ink there, but they represent the word of God. So the way we hold them is very important or the way we care for them is just a way of demonstrating respect.

When we celebrate communion here, although parents and children are sitting together, we encourage the ushers not to serve children unless they're present with their parents so parents can help their kids understand. Why? Because we want children to value communion. We want them to have a respect for what that is. In fact God tells us to respect communion and in 1 Corinthians, in the passage that we read often about communion, it says that they disregarded its value and some of them got sick and some of them even died as a result of their disrespect of communion. It's important.

Keep a distance from the tabernacle, he's saying. He's trying to teach them something very important about His character as He's moving forward.

Now it says *the tent of meeting* there. Maybe your version says *tabernacle*. Now the tent of meeting or the tabernacle (the same thing), was the portable temple that was used from the Exodus when they left Egypt all the way till they got to the Promised Land and set up the eventual temple. They had this tabernacle. The portable temple. It had to be taken down every time they moved, set up every time they arrived at their new location. And this tabernacle, we're told a lot of specific things about it.

In this diagram you can see a lot of pieces. You have pillars around the edges and you have holes or cords that hold them. You have a cloth that forms the wool that goes around and you have kind of a gate in the middle made out of these animal skins or cloths as well.

The key elements within this particular picture are the big construction in the back that contains the holy place and the most holy place with some furniture inside. You have the laver then, just outside of that, that kind of gold bowl where they would wash the meat or they would wash their hands. That's where that washing would take place. In front of that they had that altar there where they would burn the sacrifices. Those other tables that are around there, they're just as what it might be. They weren't prescribed, but in this illustration they put them there. This tabernacle was to be in the center of all of the camp where everybody would be.

This is a beautiful picture of what it might have looked like at night in the dark where you have the tabernacle and this beautiful flame of fire over the Holy of Holies that people would be able to see. When that flame moved, it was time for them to pack up and move and go to the next place. In the daytime they had a cloud that covered them. When the cloud covered them it probably protected them from the sun, and when it moved they would go under it and they would keep moving with the cloud.

If you notice, this is a beautiful picture because it goes so far in the distance to show you how far the people were camped. We're going to see now the order of the camp as we go through. We're going to see the orderliness that God had established for the people as they were camping and as they were traveling.

Let's finish verse 2. It says, "*The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family.*"

The standards and banners were these representations that you would see. It's interesting in this picture that they didn't put any standards or banners. It would have been nice if they would have. These must have been things high on poles that you could tell where you were in the camp. You could identify this is my standard. I can get to where I need to be that way.

These standards or banners that were high up in the air are interesting in particular because they're mentioned so many times in the passage. Some kind of a flag. We don't know what they were, but Jewish tradition tells us some interesting things. Now what I'm about to tell you is not in the Bible. It's a Jewish tradition and then in Christian tradition as well that there are some banners.

I want you to see these banners because they represent four different images. We're going to see today four different groups of people around the tabernacle camping. Each of the four groups have three within them, so that represents twelve tribes all together. But the four groups all together are represented in these different tribes. So we have the tribe of Judah is going to stand for three different tribes, the tribe of Ephraim is going to stand for three other tribes, and Reuben and Dan as we go through. So we're going to see that as we read through.

But the interesting idea here is that they came from this passage in Ezekiel 1:10. *Their faces looked like this.* Ezekiel got a picture of heaven and got to see the angels there. Some of them looked a little strange, unlike the angels we sometimes imagine or see in pictures. *Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.*

So those four images are mentioned in the Bible and become what tradition says the banners that were used for the people of Israel. What's interesting is in the New Testament then we bring these same ideas into the New Testament. We come to the four gospels and we see that each one of the gospels has also been given a mascot.

In early Christian tradition Matthew is given the mascot of the lion because the gospel of Matthew (remember there's four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) teaches us about

Jesus being the king. That's why in the gospel of Matthew you have the genealogy going back through David, the kingly line. And more prophecies mentioned in the book of Matthew than any of the other gospels because we're communicating to the Jews that Jesus is the King of the Jews.

The second gospel or the gospel of Mark is represented by the ox because Jesus is presented there in the gospel of Mark as the suffering servant. It's in the gospel of Mark that we have Jesus' busiest weekend. We see Him serving continually because Mark is presenting Him that way as the servant.

In the third gospel, the gospel of Luke, Luke was a doctor and presented Jesus as the ultimate man. He's called the Son of Man in the gospel of Luke. So we see a lot of humanness about Jesus in that gospel.

In the gospel of John He's represented by the eagle because John portrays Jesus as the Son of God, that we might believe in Him. This very beautiful picture of Jesus that we can trust in Him because He's the Son of God.

Now all four of those put together give us this quadrasonic picture of who Jesus is, all tied into those particular banners. Those banners had to root back into the Old Testament, so it's tying our theology of Old Testament theology with New Testament theology together.

One more point about this that might be helpful as you're imagining the banners – this is a rendition of what it might have looked like to be the high priest. The high priest had on his breastplate twelve stones, one each for the tribes of Israel. Each of those stones have a different color. So it's imagined that maybe the banners that went up had a color to them that would correspond to the breastplate stones that were there. We don't know specifically, but we do know there were banners or standards that went up there that identified that group so people would know where to line up, where to camp their tents, and so on.

Well let's go into the passage here and look at some of them, how they camped starting in verses 3-9. It's interesting their first part they don't choose north like we do. East is their point of reference. *On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard. The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab. His division numbers 74,600.*

*The tribe of Issachar – now that's the second tribe. Three tribes are going to be under Judah on that side as they're camping. And so we're going to have those three tribes. The first one was Judah. The second one is Issachar will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. His division numbers 54,400.*

*The tribe of Zebulun (that's the third tribe) will be next. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. His division numbers 57,400.*

*All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, number 186,400. That's how they camped. So you've got the ark of the covenant there. You've got these three tribes that are camping on the one side. You're talking about a lot of people, 50,000 or more in each one of*

those groups. So that's not a small square. That's a huge square that probably extends way way out. We'll talk about how big it is I think in just a minute.

But those three are there and then notice the last statement in verse 9. It says, *They will set out first*. So you'll see up in the left-hand corner I put "camping" and then in the left-hand corner here I put "marching." So when they're marching they're on the first. These three tribes. So that's going to be our movement that direction. That's the marching. That's the first group.

Then we have these camping instructions and marching instructions that are given through there. It's interesting that in the tribe of Judah there's this guy Nahshon. Nahshon doesn't realize (and the people I'm sure don't realize) that within the loins of this man is the scarlet thread who's going to lead to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Right in the front here we have the Christ leading forward that's yet to come. So that's a beautiful picture.

East is their orientation as they're trying to move forward as opposed to north and south. We're going to see that Moses and Aaron are going to camp their families close to the ark on the east side, next week we'll see how they're positioned around the ark as we come to the Levites.

But a little bit more. Let's go on to verse 10 because we're going to go onto the next standard and this standard is going to be called the Reuben standard. There are three tribes under them. One, Reuben, and two more. They're described in verses 10 and following.

*On the south* (so when they're camping now on the south) *will be the divisions of the camp of Reuben under their standard. The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of Shedeur. His division numbers 46,500.*

*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.*

*The tribe of Gad will be next. The leader of the people of Gad is Eliasaph son of Deuel. His division numbers 45,650.*

*All the men assigned to the camp of Reuben, according to their divisions, number 151,450.* So that's Reuben. They're on the south side. Notice the next phrase. *They will set out second*. So when they're marching we have the second group here made of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. So they're going to proceed next.

Let's go on because we're going to take a break from the going around and we're going to go to the middle here because in verse 17 it tells us – *Then the tent of meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. They will set out in the same order as they encamp, each in their own place under their standard.*

So when they're camping the Levites are going to be around the ark. I should have put Levites on the front and Aaron and Moses on the front side and on the back so that they show we're surrounding the ark with the Levites.

It's very interesting that the point of reference for all of what we're talking about here is the center there. When they camped, they camped facing the center. Not facing out toward their enemies but facing toward the center because that was the presence of the Lord. That's where they saw who God was and where He was.

That's a good application for us in our own lives. Do we have as our point of reference, our center having Lord in the center of our camp or our lives? Or are we looking at all the things that are out there? We need to have our center be God and His presence.

So as these people camped they could see that big tornado-like fire. They could see it from a distance. But the tabernacle was right in the middle. When they were marching the tabernacle was protected with two groups of tribes in the front, two groups of tribes in the back. So the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle are protected in the middle of all of that.

Let's go on to the next standard. The next group of three tribes is the Ephraim standard. That's described in verse 18 and following. *On the west will be the divisions of the camp of Ephraim under their standard. The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of Ammihud. His division numbers 40,500.*

*The tribe of Manasseh will be next to them. So we have Ephraim, we have Manasseh. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. His division numbers 32,200.*

*The tribe of Benjamin will be next. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideoni. His division numbers 35,400.*

*All the men assigned to the camp of Ephraim, according to their divisions, number 108,100. So now we have them on that side when they're camping. Notice the next statement at the end there. They will set out third. So notice they are following the ark and the Levites that are there. They are the next group that are on their way.*

When you were camping in this big area and if you couldn't sleep very well at night and you came out of your tent, you would see that brilliance of a fire. I just imagine when you're watching a campfire you can just stare at the campfire for a while. It almost puts you to sleep. I'm sure people would go out there and find the reassurance that God is right there. They could look at Him. They could enjoy Him.

How big is this place that we're talking about, this camp that they're talking about? I was trying to do the numbers. This is the book of Numbers, so I've been trying to do a lot of math in regards to this book.

I imagine (this is me just imagining) about 400 square feet per family of four. Now 400 square feet is 20x20, so if we take 20 feet this way, roughly about the size of the center area for one group of four. That's not their tent. Their tent has to be inside this area. Probably all they did was sleep in a tent. I'm not saying everybody had four people, but I'm just imagining if we had groups of four what would that look like. So they would have their tent area pegged out, they'd have a little bit of cooking area and then you'd have the next tent right next to it.

Now if we have 2 million people (as we talked about last time) and we imagined there's four people in a family, we take that number, that means we're going to have 500,000. That would be the number of families and we're going to multiply that times 400 to get our square feet. I'm trying to figure out how big is this area. Some of you aren't into math or I've already lost you. But those who are kind of into math, you'll follow me on this. So 400 times 500,000 is 200 million square feet. That's your total. You need 200 million square feet.

Now what in the world is that? If you want to know how much 200 million square feet is then you've got to divide that by a square mile. A square mile is 5,280 feet times 5,280 feet. Right? That's one square mile. If you do that math then you've got 27,878,400 square feet. That's in one mile. Okay. You do the division, you divide 200 million by 27 million square feet, and you get 7.17 square miles. That means about 2.6 miles one direction and 2.6 miles the other direction and in the center you have the tabernacle.

That is a long way. You want to go visit your friend in the other camp, you've got to take a long journey to get there. That's why I say this pillar of fire must have been huge, like a tornado that people could go and see.

When you're camped in that kind of a group of people, you've got a lot of order. That's what was impressed upon me this week. Just the order that was necessary. They're camping in some reasonable.... It's not bees, just wherever they feel like going. Whenever the fire moves they go in a particular order to get where they're going.

Well let's go on and see the next set of tribes, the last set. Verse 25: *On the north will be the divisions of the camp of Dan under their standard. The leader of the people of Dan is Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. His division numbers 62,700.*

*The tribe of Asher will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Okran. His division numbers 41,500.*

*And then the tribe of Naphtali will be next. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira son of Enan. His division numbers 53,400.*

*All the men assigned to the camp of Dan number 157,600.* They're the people of Dan and it says that *they will set out last, under their standards.* So when they're marching it looks like this. When they're camping it looked like the previous slide and that's what we see as we're going through here.

Now there's no competition among these people. They're not saying, "I wish I could go first. How come I always have to go in the second group? How come I get assigned here? I like to be up in front." There's none of that going on. Everyone has their place. I think we like order and that order is so strategic for them. It's going to communicate something about the orderliness of God. It's going to communicate something about their own lives. They have a position here.

We all like order. You guys come in here every Sunday. I can pretty much know who's going to sit where because you guys always sit in the same place. We like order. We go to the same place.

That's what was happening in these camps. God had set it up that way. But the beauty of this is that God knows where everybody is. He knows their address, just like He knows our address. He knows your IP address on your computer. He knows your internet history. He knows your Facebook account. He knows your phone number. God knows all of those things and He cares about those things.

That's why all the detail here, I know it can be rather challenging to look at the details sometimes, but as we do I think we see something very important about God. So I want to spend some time in the details here because you're left with an impression. "Wow, that was a lot of detail. Wow, that was a lot of numbers." Yeah. I think God included them so we could get to know Him a little better. He's concerned about the details in life.

Let's go on to verse 32. *These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All the men in the camps, by their divisions, number 603,550. The Levites, however, were not counted along with the other Israelites, as the Lord commanded Moses.*

So we're going to learn all about the Levites and their jobs and their specific things that they did next week. Fascinating study about the Levites. I already started working on that. I think you'll find that interesting. But at this point, I just want to stop and I want us just to be reminded that God is at the center of their lives. We need to ask ourselves, is God at the center of our lives?

Secondly I want you to see what the smallest unit of people is that they identified there. You see that? Let's go back to verse 2. I think that's probably the best example. It says, *each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family*. So as you go through, all the way through we're talking about families. So back in verse 32 – *These are the Israelites, counted according to their families*. The family is the smallest unit.

You know, in our western society we emphasize the individual. Individuality is so important. And it is true that when we come to Jesus Christ we must each come to Jesus Christ individually. We must each receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

But it's really fascinating. We hear missionaries when they're going out into tribes and when tribal leaders accept the Lord the whole tribe becomes a Christian because there's a sense of community that exists there that's different than our understanding. We say, "Wait, wait, wait. We've got to go through every one of those people and make sure that they have each made a profession of faith..." Yes, that's true, but they make the decision as a community, as a tribe.

Here we have families mentioned here and the banners that existed for each family. Notice there's banners for each family that they are flying over their tent or their area. How many tents they had per family I don't know, but they had banners for their family.

If you had a banner for your family, what would be on it? Is your family the kind of family that likes to read and so you say no to other things because you like to read. Maybe you're the family



that likes sports, so you're really into sports. Maybe the family that really enjoys being funny. That's the Smith family. They really like being funny. I really enjoy them. But they're a funny family. We have banners that go up in our lives. What's the banner we'd put up over your home? Whether your home is one person, or a couple, or it's a few people. A banner. What would that banner look like that identifies you differently than someone else?

I just am impressed as I study the passage how organized God is. Very organized.

This week I was speaking in Austin and in one of the conversations we were having among the group of people one of the ladies told about a group she's in. It's an "organize your home" group "fourteen inches at a time." I have never heard of such a thing. Fourteen inches at a time. I said, "What in the world?" She says, "Like one day we might get a whole bunch of hangers and get rid of them." So I guess slowly they're organizing their houses fourteen inches at a time.

I would suggest that we too in our lives benefit from order. Not that we all just need to be neat people, but it's the idea that God is a God of order. We're created in the image of God. As we find that order, good things happen in our own hearts.

In the church we were speaking in there was a big quilt to cover the whole wall. It was like that. A whole quilt and every one of the pieces on the quilt a family had taken the cloth and had written something about their family on that. Someone (a quilt maker person) put it all together as this big quilt to identify our church is made of a bunch of families. I really like that picture and I loved the quilt. I was going to take a picture, but the quilt was so big I couldn't get a picture of the whole quilt.

It's amazing how God is a God of order, God is organized and I would suggest that many times in our lives we try to control our worlds. Order is important, so we put ourselves into this box and we can't see where God wants us to go because we've controlled our lives so much with the order that we have. Sometimes we just need to get out of that and allow God to speak to us in some new ways. Allow Him to burst open our order that we've placed and change the order a little bit. To lead us into new territory, to build a fire in our hearts that allows us to move into something different than we've been before.

There was order in this camp, but there was also spontaneity in this camp. You never knew when that pillar of fire was going to move. You never knew when it was going to be time to go. You get up in the morning, the cloud would start moving, "Oh hey, I guess today we're going, guys," and you'd get up and go. Both of those were present in the people of Israel. God was doing some great things in their lives as a result of His character being demonstrated in His working with them. I think God can do the same thing in our lives.

As we leave this particular passage today, chapter 2, consider God's orderliness. There's a right way and a wrong way to live life. Some people think of God as just being up this mountain, you can get to Him any way you want, and so all religions are on this path toward getting to God. I want to tell you that's not true. There's a right way and a wrong way to get to God. The way that we have a personal relationship with God is that we have a personal relationship with Jesus

Christ. We accept Jesus Christ into our lives and when we do that, we're going to the right way, the right path to get to God and that relationship with Him. We learn about that.

We're impressed with that in the book of Numbers because there's a right way and a wrong way to do things. God is clarifying that in the book of Numbers for the Israelites and reminding us about His character as we move forward as well.

In a moment we're going to pray and we're going to have a worship time. During that worship time if the Lord is speaking to you and you'd like prayer, there will be prayer counselors on the side. You can go and pray with them. Maybe God is speaking to you and you want to ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart. Go to one of the prayer counselors. They'll help you and pray with you. Maybe you've got another need going on in your life and you'd like prayer. Go to one of the prayer counselors and they will pray for you and help you and guide you just in your thinking in regards to God and praying with you in regards to your specific need.

Let's stand together and let's worship the Lord. As we do, let God speak to you and impress upon you what He wants for your heart and life.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and we thank you for who you are and what you've done for us. We thank you for revealing yourself in the word and for our ability to have scripture to understand who you are and what you have for us. Lord, we want to trust you more and we want to be led by your presence more. Teach us how to follow the pillar or how to follow the cloud and to be led by you. Lord, we need you continually. Draw us so close to that truth, that we recognize our own humility that we need you every minute of our lives. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.