

May 19

Scriptures: Read Numbers 2

Key Verse: “Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard… some distance from the Tabernacle of meeting.” (Numbers 2:2)

Overview

The census not only numbered the fighting men, but also organized each person into his proper tribe (Num.1). When this was accomplished, the Lord told Moses the military plan of having four squadrons, made up of three tribes, that were to have specific places when encamped or on the march. When encamped, the Tabernacle was to be central, with the priests and Levites surrounding it. Out of reverence, each tribe was assigned a specific place at a distance surrounding it, that all would have their eyes upon it. Not only was the Tabernacle to be central in position, it was to be central in their lives and the focal point of their whole society.

No invader could come close to the Tabernacle without meeting much resistance from the soldiers. It was to be well protected and honored, for it represented the presence of God in their midst. We, also, must stand strong to defend the Lord’s honor and protect His sacred institutions. However, unlike the Israelite tribes, which were ordered to remain a distance, we are welcome to draw near to the throne of God. May our Lord, by His grace, keep us ever so close to Him, that our eyes will always be upon Him.

The tribe of Judah, being the largest and strongest, was given the most honored place (prophecy fulfilled, Ge.49:8). Their encampment was toward the rising sun to the east of the Tabernacle, facing its gate and the encampment of the priestly family. They also led in the march. However, the greatest honor given to this tribe was that through it the royal line and the Messiah would come (Gen.49:10). The leader of the tribe, Nahshon, is listed among the ancestors of Jesus (Matt.1:4).

God Himself appointed the place each tribe was to occupy. If Moses had made the choices, there could have been envy, quarrelling, and charges that he was partial, but we read how “the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses” (2:23). Likewise, the people of God today are to be obedient to God and content in the place He has put them, and they are to keep in good order and unity; this glorifies God and leads to the building up of His kingdom.

Each Israelite knows exactly where he belonged in the camp. They could not set up their tent wherever they pleased, but only where God had placed them, for our God is a “God of order, not confusion”. The divine order of the whole campsite and the grand military precision of their march must have displayed great unity and beauty (Num.24:5). They were to camp, as well as march, beside their tribe’s standard or banner. These served to distinguish between the tribes and to gather and keep them together. Under their own banner they would find safety. The prophet Isaiah wrote concerning the messiah, Jesus, that He would stand as a banner that the Gentiles would seek, a place of glorious rest (Isa.11:10). Those that serve the Lord Jesus and gather unto Him find safety there and can say with joyous hearts, “His banner over me is love” (Song of Solomon 2:4).

Prayer

Lord, please show us our place in Your plan for Your church and help us to keep our lives in order within the whole body of the people of God. May we move in unity with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.