

"Battle Preparations"

Numbers 2

When we opened Numbers 1 last week, two things stood out: First, God has moved to live among His people. When they first met God, He was on Mt. Sinai. The people were told to stay away from the mountain and only Moses could go up. God wanted the people to know He was a holy God, not a man-made god like all the Egyptian gods that God proved were false through the 10 plagues.

From the mountain God tells Moses and the Israelites to build Him a Tabernacle from which He would speak to Moses and reveal His presence through the pillar of fire at night and the cloud by day. But before the Tabernacle was finished, Moses pitched a temporary tent of meeting outside the camp. In Ex. 33 when Moses came down from the mountain and confronted them with the sin of the golden calf, God initially told Moses He would help them defeat their enemies in the land of Canaan but His presence would not go with them. We read in Ex. 33:7,

⁷ Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. ¹⁰ Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. ¹¹ The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

God threatened that His presence would not go with them because of their sin, but Moses' intercession resulted in God forgiving them and He promised to dwell with them. We'll see how important this is again in Ch. 2.

The second thing that stood out was the counting of the men, aged 20 and over who will "serve in the army" [14x]. We looked at Ex. 23:27ff where God had already told them they would need to fight their enemies and they would be victorious but it would happen 'little by little', over time. The problem is that they have no battle experience. Ch. 2 is the first step in battle preparations. What does an army need to learn first off? Organization, discipline, structure, and listen to orders.

Not surprisingly, Chapter 2 is very organized. All 12 tribes are mentioned again with their leaders and the count but now they are organized into units when they camp and when they set out. They are arranged east, south, west and north in 4 units of 3 tribes. Each 3 tribes has a connection to each other. But in the middle of the chapter, we read about the middle of the camp where the Levites guard the Tabernacle which hosts the presence of God. Everything revolves around God. And that's a good thing to keep in mind for us as we face spiritual battles in life. How can we have victory in our lives when trials, attacks and temptations occur?

Our Lives Need to Be Centered Around God
(2:1-2, 17)

They are all arranged around God at the center. When they camp or move out God is at the center. Every generation of God's people needs to have this word picture. Putting God first in your life means making God the center of your life.

1 Cor. 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Eating and drinking are necessary to survive and the most routine things we do. Paul says live all of life to show God is the weightiest/most valued thing in your life. Don't compartmentalize your life. I read my bible in the morning and then I go out to the real world. No, God is the true reality. When everyone dies who do they have to stand before? God. Why? Your life is indebted to God because He gave it to you. How did you live your life for God since He's the One who gave you life? Did you accept His gift of His Son Jesus who died for your sins who makes it possible that we can stand before God. He tells us how to live for Him in His Word so we must take time every day to listen to what He says and apply that when and where we live in this world.

Paul put it a similar way in Col. 3:17,

17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Again, how routine is speaking and doing? In our waking hours we speak and do when we're not eating or drinking. Can you do your job in Jesus' name and honour God? Do we think about that? I hope so. Do we treat our spouses and raise our children in a way that points them to God? This is what Paul was saying and this is the main point God was making in Num. 2 to these people who are just learning about God and His ways for the first time in their lives. God says, 'I'm going to live in your midst and if you stay focused on Me and listen to my words and do them, You'll see how I am with you and lead you.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: ² "The Israelites are to camp around the Tent of Meeting some distance from it, each man under his standard with the banners of his family."

While God is with them they are still to treat God as holy and keep their distance because only the tribe of Levi is to serve at the Tabernacle. We already read in Ch. 1:50

1:50 Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony—over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. ⁵¹ Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death. ⁵² The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. ⁵³ The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the Testimony so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony."

2:17 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 his own place under his standard.

Everyone is arranged around God. The Levites live and guard the presence of God from the others to remind them God is holy. He wants to live with you and be the center of your life. He will give you victory when we center our lives around Him.

Then we read a very organized list of the 12 tribes, grouped together in 3's with one of the 3 designated as the leading tribe having a specific banner that identifies them, also subdivided into

smaller family groupings identified by standards or flags. They camp and set out together as indicated. God is organizing them to be prepared for how they are going to set out against the enemy, and how they have to live together too.

While we are not commanded by God to attack our spiritual enemy, that doesn't mean we should be ill-prepared. We too need to

We Need Biblical Strategies to Face the Enemy **(2:3-9, 10-16, 18-24, 25-31)**

We too are under attack, individually and corporately. Jesus once warned Peter that Satan wanted to sift him like wheat – and he did through Peter's denial of Jesus 3 times – but Peter recovered from that and later wrote this:

1 Pet. 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Be ready when an attack happens. Resist him, standing firm in the faith because we know that your brothers (and sisters) throughout the world are undergoing the same thing. Why did God arrange the army in family groupings?

To remind them they are not alone and others need you

The army is arranged in families and tribes that have links to each other. If I'm fighting beside my family member or a close friend I'm going to do my best to protect him. Similarly, I can fight with confidence knowing my family member and close friends are watching out for me. And we see the application for us. The closer we grow with God and with one another, the more we'll pray for each other, work side by side and come to each other's aid. That's why we share prayer requests about each other's needs; it rallies us together. It keeps us close. We pray for each other's children who face challenges wherever they go in this crazy world we live in. We hurt for each other when someone is facing a difficulty personally or in their family.

The first threesome is Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. Judah was the fourth born son. Reuben and Simeon lost the privilege of blessings because Reuben defiled his father's bed by sleeping with Jacob's concubine. Simeon and Levi conspired to kill the Shechemites when one of their sons raped their sister Dinah. Judah is the next in line and Jacob blessed him in Genesis 49:8 saying his brothers will bow down to him and that the scepter will not depart from him one day. Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. Judah, Zebulun and Issachar were Leah's 4th, 5th and 6th sons. They camped on the east side facing the entrance to the Tabernacle, because it opened to the east. When they went out, Judah led.

Then they were followed by Reuben, Simeon and Gad to the south. Reuben and Simeon were Leah's first two sons while Gad was Leah's servant Bilhah's first son. So the birth order was Reuben, Simeon, (disgraced sons but # 1 and 2), Levi (whose set aside), Judah, Issachar and Zebulun (4, 5, 6), and then Gad. They are in the south, losing the place of pride that Judah and the other two now have. Reuben given the leadership of this fighting unit.

The next 3 in the west are Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, Rachel's descendants. Rachel only had Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph receives the double blessing and so his two sons each become tribes. Ephraim, though the second born was given the place of firstborn by his grandfather Jacob, much like Jacob received the firstborn rights over Esau.

The last three are the 10th, 11th and 12th born sons to Bilhah and Zilpah, the servants of Leah and Rachel with Dan, the older given leadership. Notice the pattern of all of these: this is the “camp” of so and so, next to them is, and they are next. The total men repeated as from Ch. 1. They are to set out in the arranged order. When you’re not setting out your camping. Most likely you’re doing more camping than setting out for war. So what should we do when we’re not under attack?

Use your camping time wisely so we’re ready to set out

I was talking with someone recently whose son is in the Canadian Armed Forces and has trained with a special forces unit. The things they train for are extreme and dangerous situations. He told me he asked his son once ‘How do you handle spending all this time training for something you might never experience?’ And he answered, ‘I’m fine if I never get shot at, but if I do I’ll know what to do.’

Our enemy prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. We don’t all face the same threats, attacks and temptations but if we don’t wisely prepare before-hand, we won’t be ready when we are. Listen to these familiar verses that talk about being prepared:

*Eph. 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that **when** the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

A lot of our preparation has to do with knowing the truth of God’s Word which enables us to stand firm. In 2 Cor. 10

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

People verbally attack us, saying unkind words. What does God say about us? We need to know what’s true to withstand these attacks so we’re confident in our identity in Christ. And of course Phil. 4:6-9

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Notice the emphasis on experiencing the peace of God when we think biblically. This is why reading our Bibles individually and studying it corporately are so important to defending who we are and what we believe. And Paul emphasizes the experiential results when we read God's Word and actually live by its' truths. And we're reminded again of this in vv.32-34:

³² These are the Israelites, counted according to their families. All those in the camps, by their divisions, number 603,550. ³³ The Levites, however, were not counted along with the other Israelites, as the Lord commanded Moses. ³⁴ So the Israelites did everything the Lord commanded Moses; that is the way they encamped under their standards, and that is the way they set out, each with his clan and family.

Listen to God's Instructions and Trust His Plan **(2:17, 32-34)**

But this was all practice and training and more training. But when they finally do set out for real in Ch. 10, they grumble at the first trial. Why? Because they didn't take their training seriously. They listened but they didn't act on it. They 'deceived themselves' as James says in James 1:22.

When we attentively listen to God's instructions and acting on them when we're not being tempted or attacked by the enemy, we will be ready when a challenge comes. If your life is pretty routine right now thank God and use it wisely to spend time in His word, praying for your brothers and sisters beside you who are facing challenges, knowing that our turn will come. We will have a trial. We will be attacked. We will be tempted.

The Israelites spent a lot of time together in the camp. Hopefully building relationships, getting to know the very people they will need to fight with and come to their defense. Let's use our camping time to strengthen relationships. Get to know someone whom we haven't visited much or at all. Discover how connected you are through your relationship with God and others. What issues are they struggling with that you pray with them for? How are they being attacked? What words do they need to hear from God's Word to encourage them? Be ready to go with them in their challenges and maintain communication.

God wants to be the center of our lives and we all have areas in our life that we need to relinquish control of and give over to God. But here's another encouraging thought. God wants to be surrounded by us. His ultimate goal is to spend eternity with us. One of Satan's most successful attacks is to cause us to doubt God cares about us and loves us. But remember what Jesus said, he's the father of lies. He doesn't want you to know that God's ultimate goal and great joy is to look out and see you in His camp forever.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net