

The Moving Tabernacle

Numbers 1:1 – 10:36; Key verse 9: 23: „At the Lord’s command they encamped, and at the Lord’s command they set out. They obeyed the Lord’s order, in accordance with his command through Moses.“

This is the first of five lectures on the book of Numbers. As we have seen, chronologically, Numbers directly follows the book of Exodus. It describes the forty years of wandering from Mount Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land. Exodus says, the people is free from slavery. Leviticus gives them rules to obey. Numbers tells us how God prepared the conquering of the Promised Land.

In chapters 1 to 10, we learn how God prepared his people to conquer the Promised Land. He counted them **by name** and raised them as **his army**. He set apart the **Levites** and gave privileges to the **priests** for serving the Tabernacle.

God gave a camping order and a marching order to insure that the Tabernacle would be in the **center** of the people of God. Even while they were moving the Tabernacle would be in the center of God’s people. Therefore, they had to obey. May the word of God be in the center of his people.

1. The First Census (1:1 – 4:49)

Look at verse 1. “The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said...”

The Israelites were still in the desert of Sinai. They had established the tabernacle according to God's instructions and erected it on the first day of the first month. God was dwelling among his people.

Now, the next step was to enter and conquer the Promised Land. How did God prepare his people? Let's read verses 2 and 3 „Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army.“

Moses was to count all the Israelites according to their descent, their families, clans and names, from twenty years old and over. Moses and Aaron were assisted by twelve leaders, who helped counted the men who were able to serve in the army from each of the twelve tribes. All of them were registered “head by head” and „name by name“. This shows how important one person is for God. God is not only interested in numbers: *how many are there?* but God is interested in each individual person: *Is she there? Is her there?* If even one person is missing, God is not indifferent. Jesus describes this heart of God in the parable of the lost sheep. When one sheep was missing the shepherd went out to look for it until he found it. Ps 147,4 says, “*He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.*” God helped Moses to count the Israelites with a shepherd’s heart. For a shepherd one person is the world.

Look at verse 3 again: “who are able to serve in the army.” Why was the criteria the ability to serve in the army? Because God wanted them to be his army. The census was an army recruiting census. They were counting those who were able to serve in the army. They were counted by tribes and banners.

One year before they were a bunch of slaves. Slaves lack everything. Especially discipline. But now God regarded them as his army. He recruited them banner by banner. They were God's army preparing for a war of conquest.

This teaches us a spiritual reality: Those who have been delivered from the bondage of sin by the grace of God and have received a new, eternal life in Christ, are God's army. Being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation means being a spiritual army. A kingdom of Priests and a holy nation are those who are able to serve in the army.

Accepting Christ is the beginning. After being saved, God prepares us for the war of conquest. All of us are soldiers in a holy war. This war is called World Missions. It is a holy war to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Jesus sent his disciples into this holy war. Three years before, they were selfish, ambitious, proud and weak young people. Now Jesus saw them as his soldiers. He told them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." He saw them as officers and generals for the conquest of the world.

World Mission is a spiritual war. Especially campus mission is a war for elite soldiers. Missionary Dr. Samuel Lee, the co-founder of UBF, often wore military attire in America to remind the coworkers that they are God's army for world mission and in the holy war for making America a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation – a war against the deceptive satanic demons of complacency and compromise –, and to renew their soldier spirit. M. José Ahn always wears a green beret of the special forces. And M. Peter Kim said that we cannot describe our mission without using military expressions such as battle, struggle, fight.

What does it mean to be a soldier able to serve in the army?

First, it means to suffer. Apostle Paul fought as a soldier of God in the holy war in order to obey Jesus' world mission command to the point of life or death. In 2 Timothy 2:3 he encouraged his spiritual son Timothy: "Endure hardships with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." There is no war without suffering. Even for the victorious party, a war is costly. If a soldier comes back from war and has no scars in his face and his uniform is not torn or dusty, would you believe he had been fighting? Soldiers endure hardships. Christ's soldiers endure hardships. The first generation of UBF soldiers endured hardships, especially because of their shepherd life fighting for the sheep to repent and grow as Jesus' disciples. They were attacked and accused and slandered for no reason at all, just as Jesus was and many soldiers of God throughout history. Also, many of you are enduring hardships because of being soldiers of Christ. So I pay my respect to you as good soldiers of Christ Jesus.

Two years ago, Matthäus and my son Josua and I prayed together at their school, every Friday at 11.30 am during their school break. Then the headmaster sent an e-mail asking me not enter the schoolyard for religious activities. However, those two wanted to continue this fight. So we continued to pray at the fence, with them standing inside and me standing outside. When two of Matthäus' friends joined I stopped going there. When they graduated Josua was left alone. I thought he would give up. But his soldier spirit had been awakened. He challenged his friends and now prays with three of his friends. His vision is to be a spiritual general.

We are soldiers of Christ. As soldiers of Christ we endure hardships.

Second, a soldier focuses on the battle. 2 Tim 2:4 says, "No one serving as a soldier gets

involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer.” “Civilian affairs” here means anything not related to the battle. Of course, we eat and sleep, we study and work, we care for our children and our property. However, as soldiers we do not get involved in affairs that are not related to the spiritual war of World Mission. Sometimes, we are tempted to avoid the battle. Then we must remember that we are soldiers wearing the same uniform as our commanding officer Jesus and as our fellow soldiers who lived to please their Lord.

Last year, we experienced that those who took part in the Global Leadership Empowerment Forum 2018 were used as a blessing at the International Summer Bible Conference and in their chapters because they accepted spiritual training and avoided civilian affairs. This war goes on until Jesus comes again. Within this war, Global Leadership Empowerment is not an event, but a spiritual training program for God’s army, as they set out to conquer the World.

Third, a soldier knows his unit. Look at verse 3 again, “Number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army.” “By their divisions” means that each soldier has a certain position in a certain unit. A man from Reuben would not join the division of Judah. When I was doing military service, my unit was the Staff Flying Group in Fighter Bomber Squadron 33. So in the case of a war I would have to fight for the Airforce, supporting Tornado planes to get out into battle and drive the enemy away and save the German people.

We are God’s army. We are soldiers called to endure and fight. We avoid being involved in civilian affairs. Each of us is so important to God.

Now let us look at the numbers.

The number from the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.
The number from the tribe of Simeon was 59,300.
The number from the tribe of Gad was 45,650.
The number from the tribe of Judah was 74,600.
The number from the tribe of Issachar was 54,400.
The number from the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400.
The number from the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500.
The number from the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.
The number from the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.
The number from the tribe of Dan was 62,700.
The number from the tribe of Asher was 41,500.
The number from the tribe of Naphtali was 53,400.
The total number was 603,550.

The tribe of the Levites were not counted. Let's read verses 49 and 50: “You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law—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.” The Levites were not to be counted in the census. Why? Because they were set apart and appointed to for the service of the tabernacle. In an army during wartime, every single man is needed. But God set apart a whole tribe for service in the tabernacle-- the service for the tabernacle of God was the most important service in the spiritual battle. According to verse 53, this service protected the people of God from God’s wrath.

What does this mean? It means that the word of God is in the center of God's people. In the center of the camp was the Tabernacle. In the Tabernacle was the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark of the covenant there was the Law. The word of God was in the center. 2:2 says, "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." The whole camping order of the people of God was arranged around the word of God.

This teaches us that God's army has the word of God in their center. The UBF ministry always was like a family. Whenever we went to Chicago we felt at home, because of the same spirit and same mission. Dr. Lee was like a spiritual father to us. In the center of the worldwide ministry of UBF there was an office in the HQ in Chicago. In the office there was a small man with a Bible in his hand. Everything else was arranged around the word of God.

In the past 39 years, Bonn UBF has experienced how important Bible study is for the spiritual survival and growth of each individual and the entire church. Some churches have moved away from Bible study and have shifted their focus to human fellowship or social activities; because it sounds attractive. Unfortunately, we see that such churches do not keep the wrath of God away. They also do not grow spiritually, and can hardly be used for God's work of salvation. But God blessed the Bible study among us, through the Bible study of God's servant, the training of messengers and Bible teachers, daily fellowship with the word of God, writing of testimonies, Bible conferences and Bible seminars. We were able to experience that God dwells in our midst.

Bible study is crucial in preparing and carrying out the war of conquest that lies ahead of us. Ezra was a priest from the tribe of Levi whose heart burned for his people. At his time the law was already 1,000 years old and was ridiculed. Babylonian culture had swallowed everything. But Ezra realized that spiritual renewal could only begin if his people devoted themselves to Bible study. That is why he devoted his heart to studying the law of the Lord, obeying it, and teaching its decrees and laws in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Through Bible study, Ezra laid the foundation for the spiritual renewal of the people of God that they might become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation with God in their midst.

How can we prepare ourselves, our Bible students, our children for the spiritual war? Through intensive Bible study. God's word has to be in the center of all our activities, of every community and fellowship. Then God will be at the center of our life. God will bless every Bible-centered community, house church, ministry, will dwell among them and give them victory in the war of conquest!

Even when the people of God were moving the Tabernacle stayed in the center. How? God gave them a very wise marching order.

The Levites were divided into three families: The Gershonites took care of the dwelling and the tent and its blankets and the curtains and capes. The Kohathites were responsible for the ark, the table, the candlestick, the altars and all the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering. Finally, the Merarites were in charge for the larger and heavier things, the crossbars, posts, bases of the tabernacle and of the courtyard with their tent pegs, and ropes. Then they marched in the order; first the camp of Judah – then the Gershonites and Merarites – then the camp of Reuben – then the Kohathites – then the camps of Ephraim and of Dan. When the Kohathites arrived, the Gershonites and Merarites had already set up the Tabernacle. By this beautiful camp and marching order it was ensured that the tabernacle remained in the center.

Through this marching order the Israelites could understand, that the word of God is the most holy thing among them. They learned to value it and to protect it at any cost. As believers we are called to carry God's dwelling place with us wherever we go, in other words to keep the word of God in the center of our life. Some of you have moved to another city because of your school studies. As you are moving you are carrying God's dwelling place along with you, because the word of God is in the center of your life. Where there is one person with faithful Bible study, a whole school becomes God's dwelling place.

Verse 3:15 says that the Levites were counted when they were one young month old. Some think of the little children as "still children, too small for the word of God". God says: No. They are already set apart for the care of the tabernacle in the middle of my people. No child is too small to have God at the center of his life and to contribute to the victory of God's people. When they are one month old we should start to teach them their role and privilege to be set apart for the service at God's tabernacle.

As we saw, the Levites took care of the transport of the moving tabernacle. They had to do this with holy fear. If one of them left something behind, God could not be worshipped in God's way. The Levites were not allowed to touch the holy objects by themselves, but only to carry them on poles. They were not even allowed to look at the holy things (20). In 1 and 2 Samuel we see that the Levites of Beth Shemesh (1 Sam 6:19) and Uzzah (2 Sam 6:7) treated the ark without fear and did not obey these commandments. The wrath of God came upon them. God's people must have fear of God.

In chapters 1-4 we have seen that God prepared his people for war by dwelling in their midst. He ordered the Levites to serve and gave his people a clear camping and marching order so that the word of God remained in the center.

2. The Israelites did at the Lord's command (5:1 - 10:36)

Now everything was ready for departure. Israel was established as God's army. God had provided for the service at the tabernacle. Everyone had his clear position and task for camping and travelling. Before they set out, God gave his people some instructions.

First, those who had a defiling skin disease, a discharge of any kind, or who were ceremonially unclean because of a dead body, should be sent away from the camp so that the camp would not be defiled.

Second, those who wrong another in any way must make full restitution for the wrong and add a fifth of the value to it and give it to the person they have wronged or to the priest.

Third: If adultery is suspected, the woman must be examined before the Lord by the priest to determine her innocence or to punish her guilt.

The sins discussed here: Impurity, ruthless self-interest, and adultery are sins that quickly spread in the church of God and put the ego back in the center if they are not dealt with. When children see that God's church does not care for families in the church to live as holy house churches, how can they learn to establish God- and mission-centered house churches? The church must be mindful of the influence of sin. In a church that consistently rejects the influence of sin within while serving mission, God remains the center.

Chapter 6 contains the regulations for Nazirites and the priestly blessing. In chapter 7 we find the offerings of the tribal leaders for the dedication of the tabernacle. By offering the sacrifice for the consecration of the altar, the tribal leaders recognized God as the center

of their lives and the life of their tribe. Through their sacrifice, they formed a unity with God in the center.

The final preparation for setting out towards the Promised land was the celebration of the Passover at the appointed time. The Passover reminded the Israelites of who the Lord was. Exodus 20:2 says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." God's grace of salvation, through which God revealed himself as the Lord Almighty and sovereign God, is the foundation of which we must be reminded again and again.

Finally, they moved out. Verse 17 says, "Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped." This verse says that the Israelites followed God's guidance. Verse 18 says: "At the Lord's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp." Let us read verses 22 and 23: "Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses." An army has to obey. Victory comes from obedience. God's army has to obey God's instructions. Through obedience, the moving tabernacle was carried on through the desert for the victorious campaign of conquest.

Bonn UBF key verse is Ezekiel 37:10: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army." Since it is God's command, we have to obey. We obey by forming 1:1 Bible study teams. It is hard. But it is God's command. It is God's wisdom and God's strategy. As officers we understand and we obey and we help NG leaders and Bible students to obey. Through obedience, we experience God's mighty work among young people. May God have mercy as we fight to conquer university in Bonn, St. Augustin, Rheinbach, Koblenz and may he raise up a vast army.

Chapter 10 finally reports that the Israelites set out, this first time, from the Desert of Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after the exodus from Egypt. They set out after the trumpet signal according to God's arrangement. They traveled for three days from place to place to the desert. They camped there at the Lord's command. God's army was marching out to the Promised Land after God's careful preparation.

Today we learned God's preparation for his people for the holy war. He counted each of them by name. He appointed the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law. He gave them a clear camp and marching order to ensure that the word of God was in the center and that he could dwell among them. May God help us to follow God's guidance and to gain victory in the holy war of world campus mission.