

Sermon #03 — *Christ in Numbers*

Title: **CAMPING WITH CHRIST**

Text: Numbers 2:1-34

Subject: *The Order of Israel's Camp*

Date: Tuesday Evening — December 17, 2019

Readings: *Lindsay Campbell and David Burge*

Introduction:

The title of my message is **CAMPING WITH CHRIST**. Our text will be the 2nd chapter of the Book of Numbers. — Number 2:1-34 — **CAMPING WITH CHRIST**.

When Balaam looked down upon the outstretched camp of Israel, he was greatly moved by what he saw. The beauty of the camp was captivating. Its order was magnificent. — This was no common camp. These were not common nomads. **Balaam said of Israel**, “*How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters*” (Numbers 24:5-6). **Let's read about what he saw — Numbers 2:1-34.**

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

(Numbers 2:1-34) And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, (2) **Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard**, with the ensign of their father's house: **far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch**. (3) **And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah** pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon the son of Amminadab *shall be* captain of the children of Judah. (4) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred. (5) And those that do pitch next unto him *shall be* the tribe of Issachar: and Nethaneel the son of Zuar *shall be* captain of the children of Issachar. (6) And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, *were* fifty and four thousand and four hundred. (7) *Then* the tribe of Zebulun: and Eliab the son of Helon *shall be* captain of the children of Zebulun. (8) And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, *were* fifty and seven thousand and four hundred. (9) All that were numbered in

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

the camp of Judah *were* an hundred thousand and fourscore thousand and six thousand and four hundred, throughout their armies. **These shall first set forth.**

(10) **On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben** according to their armies: and the captain of the children of Reuben *shall be* Elizur the son of Shedeur. (11) And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, *were* forty and six thousand and five hundred. (12) And those which pitch by him *shall be* the tribe of Simeon: and the captain of the children of Simeon *shall be* Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. (13) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* fifty and nine thousand and three hundred. (14) Then the tribe of Gad: and the captain of the sons of Gad *shall be* Eliasaph the son of Reuel. (15) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* forty and five thousand and six hundred and fifty. (16) All that were numbered in the camp of Reuben *were* an hundred thousand and fifty and

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

one thousand and four hundred and fifty, throughout their armies. And they shall set forth in **the second rank**.

(17) **Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards.**

(18) **On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim according to their armies:** and the captain of the sons of Ephraim *shall be* Elishama the son of Ammihud. (19) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* forty thousand and five hundred. (20) And by him *shall be* the tribe of Manasseh: and the captain of the children of Manasseh *shall be* Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. (21) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* thirty and two thousand and two hundred. (22) Then the tribe of Benjamin: and the captain of the sons of Benjamin *shall be* Abidan the son of

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

Gideoni. (23) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* thirty and five thousand and four hundred. (24) All that were numbered of the camp of Ephraim *were* an hundred thousand and eight thousand and an hundred, throughout their armies. And **they shall go forward in the third rank.**

(25) **The standard of the camp of Dan shall be on the north side by their armies:** and the captain of the children of Dan *shall be* Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. (26) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* threescore and two thousand and seven hundred. (27) And those that encamp by him *shall be* the tribe of Asher: and the captain of the children of Asher *shall be* Pagiel the son of Ocran. (28) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* forty and one thousand and five hundred. (29) Then the tribe of Naphtali: and the captain of the children of Naphtali *shall be* Ahira the son of Enan. (30) And his host, and those that were numbered of them, *were* fifty and three thousand

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

and four hundred. (31) All they that were numbered in the camp of Dan *were* an hundred thousand and fifty and seven thousand and six hundred. **They shall go hindmost with their standards.**

(32) These *are* those which were numbered of the children of Israel by the house of their fathers: all those that were numbered of the camps throughout their hosts *were* six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.

(33) **But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses.** (34) **And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses: so they pitched by their standards, and so they set forward, everyone after their families, according to the house of their fathers.**

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

May God the Holy Ghost be our Teacher, may he enlighten our minds, and with the light of heaven, as we observe with the mind of Christ that which Balaam beheld with carnal mind and carnal eyes.

Proposition: As Israel camped around the tabernacle in the wilderness, so God's saints, his elect, the church of God camps with Christ in this wilderness of time and space we call earth.

Divisions: Let me call your attention to five things in this chapter.

1. The Standard
2. The Position
3. The Tents
4. The Order
5. The Levites

THE STANDARD

1st — **The first thing that catches my attention in reading these 34 verses of Inspiration is the standard of the camp.** Every man in Israel was

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

required to pitch his tent “*by his own standard with the ensign of his father’s house*” (v. 2). Much speculation has been made about the standards and ensigns of Israel’s encampment, but they are nowhere described for us in the Book of God, and that with good reason. — **These banners and ensigns all point us to the Lord Jesus Christ, Jehovah-nissi, the Lord our Banner** (Exodus 17:15; Isaiah 49:22; 59:19; 10:10-12). The church of God is described as a great army with banners (Song of Solomon 1:8).

(Exodus 17:15) And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi.

(Isaiah 49:22) Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in *their* arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders.

(Isaiah 59:19) So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.

(Isaiah 11:10-12) And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. (11) And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. (12) And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Banner, the Standard, of our Father's House. By this Banner we march. Beneath this Banner we rest.

- The Banner to be Lifted Up
- The Banner that Draws the Family Together

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

- The Banner that is Our Rallying Point
- The Banner that Unites
- The Banner of Love

The banner is a pledge of safety. True, mighty foes hate and assail us. True, night and day they plot and rage, and draw the bow, and lay the snare. But all must fail. All shall fall! The fight may be both fierce and long, but in Christ's camp there is no defeat.

Beneath our Banner, Christ Jesus we find sweet repose (Matthew 11:28-30).

- Here weary sinners find rest.
- Here believing souls lay down and rest (Psalm 4:8; Isaiah 27:3).

(Psalm 4:8) I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

(Isaiah 27:3) I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest *any* hurt it, I will keep it night and day.

Beneath this Banner, Christ Jesus, victory is sure.

— *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place”* (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Illustration: Janitor Reading Revelation —
“Jesus wins!”

Happy the camp over which Christ is the Banner! Christ crucified is Salvation’s Captain. — His cross is our glory. — His heaven our rest!

Believer, glory in your banner and be steadfast.

— *“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”* (Galatians 6:14). — *“Christ is All!”*

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

THE POSITION

2nd — **The next thing that catches my mind is the position of the tents in Israel's encampment.** All the tents of Israel share one grand privilege. — **They were all pitched around the tabernacle** (v. 2). They all have common focus. As the planets circle the sun, so these surround the sanctuary. **God is the center. Christ and his salvation stands constantly before their eyes!** They form the wide circle. And from each tent door one thing was seen — the holy tent — the tabernacle.

- The Altar of Sacrifice — The Sacrifice
- The Cleansing Laver — Regenerating Grace
- The Priest — Our Great High Priest
- The Veil — The Way of Access
- The Mercy-seat — Christ our Propitiation

God in Christ Jesus is the center — the heart — the life — the strength — the shield — the joy of his people. In their midst he dwells — their glory and delight. When they go forth, their eyes are fixed on

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

him. When they return, it is to nestle round him, in his presence.

- **Be wise and pitch your tent toward the tabernacle, not toward Sodom!**
- **The Israelites of old pitched their tents “far off” from the tabernacle.** — Blessed be God, things are far better in this Gospel Age. — We are now brought nigh by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

In Revelation 4 and 5 we see the mercy-seat as the throne of God. That is how Isaiah saw it (Isaiah 6). It is called a “*glorious high throne from the beginning*” (Jeremiah 17:12). The throne is surrounded by spiritual Israelites, twenty-four elders, double the number of the tribes. They are all “*clothed in white raiment*” (Revelation 4:4), the righteousness of God in Christ. And the banner over them is Love, the everlasting love of the eternal God! **But we are not ordered, as they were, to pitch afar off.** Oh, no! We are invited to draw near and come boldly (Hebrews 4:16). The saints of the Most High are said to be “*round about him,*” bringing “*presents unto*

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

*him that ought to be feared” (Psalm 76:10). **God by his grace, making us one with his own dear Son, keeps us close to him!** — Blessed, blessed position!*

THE TENTS

3rd — **Third, please observe that these chosen, redeemed people, as long as they walked through the wilderness dwelt in tents.**

- Not Palaces!
- Not Stately Houses!
- Not Constructed Buildings!
- Not Splendid Estates!
- Tents!

The contrast with all the people around them is unavoidably obvious. They live in tents. Tents that stand today. Tomorrow sees the cords relaxed — the fastenings removed, and a vacant place. They are the pilgrim-dwellings of a pilgrim troop — the short-lived homes of short-lived sojourners.

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

Such is our present state of mortality. What is our body? It is nothing but clay. These frames have one origin — the dust. The vilest reptile and the proudest prince come from the same mire. Is it not folly, then, to pamper and admire this flesh? At best these bodies of flesh are tents — just tents that must soon be removed (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:11).

(2 Corinthians 4:17-5:11) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; (18) While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. (5:1) For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (5) Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. (6) Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (7) (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) (8) We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (9) Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (11) Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

How soon these tents crumble! No care — no thought — no art can lengthen out our days! The countless families of foregone ages — where are

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

they now? Dust they were. To dust they have returned. The many families of this our day — where do they speed? Dust they are — to dust they must return. The tents must fall. **But when?**

- Perhaps Another Day!
- Perhaps a Few Hours!
- Perhaps a Step!
- Perhaps a Breath!
- My Appointed Time!

My soul, from Israel's tents, you learn, how fleeting life's little day is! — When I go hence, is an abiding mansion mine? There is a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. Is it for me? Christ lives to prepare everlasting mansions for his people. Are they for me? — Yes. They are. I know that because I believe on the Son of God. — Do you?

Flesh is what we are, no more, just fallen, sinful, dying flesh! But that fact itself commends the grace of God in Christ Jesus. He scorned not to assume our flesh! He took on him the seed of

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

Abraham! Amazing fact! He took our clothing, as his own. Beneath these rags he hid the glories of his glorious Deity. **No man was ever man more thoroughly than the man Christ Jesus.** He tabernacled here in manhood's baseness, as truly as he showed forth the Godhead's brightness. He thus descended, that he might endure — that he might suffer — that he might bleed — that he might die — that he might bear the curse — and that he might hang upon the cross.

This none but man could do, therefore his tent was pitched, as man, among the sons of men (John 1:14). **He was made man, that he might be made sin. He was made sin, that he might take it away.** He sought a lowly tent (body) to do a God-like work.

But soon the degradation passed. Humiliation's valley was left. The cross was his chariot of triumph. And now in heaven — at God's right hand — on glory's throne — the God-man sits. Manhood now shines in him arrayed in light of

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

Deity. And all who are joined to him, made one with him, will soon behold and possess that glory. **Our vile bodies shall be changed.** Weakness and frailty shall put on unfading freshness and strength. The lowly bud shall bloom into a glorious flower. The glorious Head will leave no member in decay.

Blessed are they, whose faith discerns him nailed as their Surety on the tree. He comes — He quickly comes to gild mortality with life.

Happy the inhabitant of this crumbling frame.
— **I am Christ's!** I am now the vilest dust. But I will soon shine more brightly than ten thousand suns, in the glory of the Sun of Righteousness, the Son of God, my Savior!

THE ORDER

4th — **Now, consider for just a few minutes the order of the camp.** What perfect regularity appears! Rule draws each line. Arrangement is

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

complete. These streets of tents are uniformity's perfection.

One truth is here distinctly written. **Our God delights in order. Where he presides, confusion vanishes.**

- In Providence
- In the Believer's Life
- In His Church

With the unbeliever things are different. His life is an upset hive. The notes all jar — movements all jostle. It is a jumbled chaos of desire — attempt — design. Motives conflict with motives — thoughts with thoughts — plans with plans. Why is it so? God is not in all his thoughts! — There is no order in this world, except in the Camp of God.

In Israel's camp each tribe and every person has his place. The family of Aaron guard the tabernacle's door. The sons of Levi encircle the holy tent. The other tribes occupy their specifically

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

appointed ground. God fixes all the bounds, and all the bounds are gladly kept.

- Each one has his place.
- Each is prepared for his place.
- Each does what he was created to do.

Each enters on the stage of life, as God is pleased to call. Each runs a pre-ordained course. Each disappears, when the allotted task is done. We see this clear arrangement throughout the church's history. At the set time the sun of Moses sets — the star of Joshua dawns — the several Judges rule — the several kings ascend the throne. In the right season Paul labors — and apostles preach — and martyrs seal the truth with blood — and each devoted teacher toils — and each disciple aids the Gospel-cause. God orders each one's station in the Gospel-Camp.

Children of God, bow humbly before God's ordering throne.

- Discontentment will flee.
- Murmurings will cease.

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

- Christ will be honored.
- God's order for me, God's place for me, God's will for me, God's time for me is best.

THE LEVITES

5th— Just briefly observe this fact, too. — **The Levites were not numbered with the children of Israel.** — *“But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses”* (v. 33). — *“The priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance”* (Joshua 18:7).

The Levitical family represented Christ our High Priest, though he sprang from the tribe of Judah.

— Though they were part of Israel, they were always held in distinction from their brethren. And though the Lord Jesus Christ is one of us and one with us, he is infinitely distinct from us.

(Colossians 2:9-10) For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (10) And ye are

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

(Colossians 1:18) And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

The Levites who served the tabernacle also represent God's servants in all ages.

- God's servants, gospel preachers, are men who live to serve the house of God.
- Those preach the gospel are to live by the gospel.
- Like the Levites of old, gospel preachers are not to be engaged in mundane affairs.

Illustration: "Poor Felix has shriveled from a missionary to an ambassador." — William Carey speaking of his son, Felix, becoming an ambassador for the king of Burma

(Hebrews 11:13-16) These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Numbers 2:1-34

them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (14) For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. (15) And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. (16) But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

That is what it is to camp with Christ. — Campong with Christ! Oh, blessed, happy camping. I've always enjoyed camping. But after just a few days, I have always been anxious to get home. — Usually, I did, a day or two early!

Amen.