

Numbers 2:18-24

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The three tribes assigned to the west side of the tabernacle were Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. These tribes were to move out third when the Israelites made their way through the wilderness.

The three tribes who were to camp on the west side of the tabernacle were to gather around *the standard of the camp of Ephraim*. Thus the three tribes on the western side were to bear the name “camp of Ephraim.” Ephraim was the second son of Joseph (Genesis 41:52). Though Manasseh is the firstborn of Joseph, Ephraim was given priority over Manasseh by his father (Genesis 48:5 – 20). This priority is reflected here in the fact that Manasseh was to camp with the “standard” of Ephraim. The two sons of Joseph took the place of Joseph and Levi as tribes numbering twelve, among the fighting tribes of Israel. The tribe of Levi was exempted from military service since the Levites were exclusively to serve as priests of the tabernacle.

The scripture has a pattern of the second son being elevated over the first, as Ephraim was elevated over Manasseh. Adam and Eve’s second son Abel was more righteous than Cain. The secondborn Jacob was blessed above the firstborn Esau. The second king David’s dynasty supplanted the first king Saul’s. This pattern likely foreshadows the elevation of Jesus (the second Adam) above the first Adam (Romans 5:14). Jesus the God-man was honored for His faithfulness by being granted all authority (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 3:21). The church might also be considered as fitting this pattern, as it is to reign with Christ as His bride, and be elevated over the angels, which were created prior to humans (Psalm 8; Hebrews 2; Ephesians 5).

Like the others, these tribes on the west were arranged *by their armies*. Each tribe was an army, so there were three armies guarding each side. *The leader of the sons of Ephraim* was then named: *Elishama the son of Ammihud*. This agrees with what was stated in Numbers 1:10. The size of *his army, even their numbered men*, was 40,500. This is the same number that was given in Numbers 1:33.

The second tribe to camp on the east as a part of the camp of Ephraim, which were to *camp next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh*. *The leader of the sons of Manasseh* was *Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur* (Numbers 1:10). The size of *his army, even their numbered men*, was 32,200. This is the same number that was given in Numbers 1:35.

The third in line on the western side was *the tribe of Benjamin, and the leader of the sons of Benjamin* was *Abidan the son of Gideoni* (Numbers 1:11). The size of Benjamin’s *army, even his numbered men*, was 35,400 (v. 23). This is the same number that was given in Numbers 1:37.

So, *the total of the numbered men of the camp of Ephraim was 108,100, by their armies* (v. 24). This was the total number of troops on the west side of the tabernacle. *And they shall set out third*, meaning that they would march immediately behind the tabernacle surrounded by the

Levites. The camp of Ephraim's 108,100 troop count compared to a troop strength of 151,450 for the camp of Reuben on the south side, and 186,400 for the camp of Judah, who walked first in line, and camped on the east side of the tabernacle.

Biblical Text

¹⁸“On the west side *shall be* the standard of the camp of Ephraim by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Ephraim *shall be* Elishama the son of Ammihud,¹⁹ and his army, even their numbered men, 40,500.²⁰ Next to him *shall be* the tribe of Manasseh, and the leader of the sons of Manasseh: Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur,²¹ and his army, even their numbered men, 32,200.²² Then *comes* the tribe of Benjamin, and the leader of the sons of Benjamin: Abidan the son of Gideoni,²³ and his army, even their numbered men, 35,400.²⁴ The total of the numbered men of the camp of Ephraim: 108,100, by their armies. And they shall set out third.