

Numbers 2:3-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-2/numbers-23-9/>

The three tribes assigned to the east side of the tabernacle were Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. They were the fourth, fifth, and sixth sons of Jacob by Leah. The number of men eligible for military service was given for each tribe. The name of the tribal leader is also given. These tribes were to move out first ahead of the tabernacle when the Israelites made their way through the wilderness.

The first group of tribes to be mentioned were *those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise*. Some believe that the *east* was significant to Israel and other peoples of the Ancient Near East. First, the east was *toward the sunrise*, the beginning of light piercing the darkness and giving hope and guidance to those in darkness. Also, the entrance into the tabernacle was on the east side (Exodus 27:13 – 14). The Garden of Eden was “toward the east” (Genesis 2:8), and the LORD placed cherubim “at the east of the garden of Eden” in order “to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24).

The three tribes on the east were to gather around *the standard of the camp of Judah*. They were arranged *by their armies*. Then, *the leader of the sons of Judah* was named, *Nahshon the son of Amminadab*. This is in line with what was stated in Numbers 1:7. Nahshon was the brother-in-law of Aaron (Exodus 6:23). And the size of *his army, even their numbered men*, was 74,600. This is the same number that was given in Numbers 1:27.

It was appropriate that Judah was named first. He was given a higher status than his older brothers (Reuben, Simeon, and Levi) because of their erratic and rebellious behavior (Genesis 49:3 – 7). In fact, Judah was named as the royal line (Genesis 49:10) in which the Messiah would come (Ruth 4:18 – 21; Matthew 1:1 – 16). It appears that Judah was to march first, and lead the procession when Israel went on the march.

The second tribe to camp on the eastern side *next to Judah shall be the tribe of Issachar*. *The leader of the sons of Issachar* was *Nethanel the son of Zuar* (Numbers 1:8). The size of *his army—numbered men* was 54,400. This is the same number that was given in Numbers 1:29.

Next in line to camp along the eastern side of the tabernacle was *the tribe of Zebulun, and the leader of the sons of Zebulun* was *Eliab the son of Helon* (Numbers 1:9). The size of Zebulun’s *army—his numbered men* was 57,400. This is the same number that was given in Numbers 1:31. These three tribes were to camp along the eastern border of the tabernacle. They will be referred to as *the camp of Judah*.

So, *the total of the numbered men of the camp of Judah* was 186,400, *by their armies* (v. 9). This was the total number of troops on the east side of the tabernacle. There would have also been camping with them women and children, including males less than twenty years of age.

These three tribes on the east were to *set out first* when the congregation marched to alter their location. To be the tribes who “set out first” was a point of honor. They led the procession of the other tribes and the tabernacle with the Levites.

Biblical Text

³ Now those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise *shall be* of the standard of the camp of Judah, by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Judah: Nahshon the son of Amminadab,⁴ and his army, even their numbered men, 74,600.⁵ Those who camp next to him *shall be* the tribe of Issachar, and the leader of the sons of Issachar: Nethanel the son of Zuar,⁶ and his army, even their numbered men, 54,400.⁷ *Then comes* the tribe of Zebulun, and the leader of the sons of Zebulun: Eliab the son of Helon,⁸ and his army, even his numbered men, 57,400.⁹ The total of the numbered men of the camp of Judah: 186,400, by their armies. They shall set out first.