

The Moving Tabernacle

Numbers 1:1 – 10:36

Key verse 9:22,23

„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.“

Thanks be to God for enabling us to complete the Exodus Bible Study last week. We came to know God as the God of salvation and of hope, who used one leader Moses to raise his people as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We have been raised as spiritual leaders like Moses, who intercede for the young people of this generation, and who help them to establish the dwelling of God in God's way through obedience by faith.

Today we want to start Numbers Bible Study. Chronologically, Numbers directly follows the book of Exodus, and continues to describe the wandering of the people of God from Mount Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land. In chapters 1 to 4, we learn how God prepared his people. He counted them by name and raised them as his army to conquer the Promised Land. He used the Levites for the service of the tabernacle that was located in the middle of the Israelite encampment. Victory or defeat in war was dependent on whether or not God was in their midst. Moreover, in chapters 5-10 God gave his people precise instructions for their wandering so that God could remain in their midst. Today, let us renew our decision to march into the holy war of campus mission with God in the centre of our lives and to follow his guidance.

1. The first Census (1:1 – 4:49)

Look at verse 1. The Israelites were still in the desert of Sinai. They had established

the tabernacle according to God's instructions. God was dwelling among his people. Now, they stood right on the brink of the Promised Land. How did God prepare his people? Let's read verse 2: „Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one.“ Moses was to count all the Israelites who were fit for military service according to their descent, their families, clans and names, from twenty years old and over. Moses and Aaron were assisted by twelve clan heads, who helped counted the men who were fit for military service from each of the twelve tribes: from Reuben 46,500, from Simeon 59,300, from Gad 45,650, from Judah 74,600, from Issachar 54,400, Zebulun 57,400, Ephraim 40,500, Manasseh 32,200, Benjamin 35,400, Dan 62,700, Asher 41,500, and Naphtali 53,400, a total of 603,550. 603,550 is no small number. Nonetheless, the counting was „head by head“ and „name by name“. This shows how important one person is for God. God is not only interested in how many people are there, but who there is. If even one person is missing, God is not indifferent. Jesus describes this heart of God in the parable of the lost sheep. With this heart, God had Moses count the Israelites. He called them „his army“. They camped under the banner of their tribes. This shows with which aim God had led his people out of slavery, that is to use them as his army in the war. They were now, one year after God had led them out of slavery, made a covenant with them, gave his law to them and established his dwelling among

them, God's army. God wanted to use them to conquer the Promised Land, to purify it from its idols and to build God's temple in it, and finally to send the Messiah for the salvation of the world.

Now he prepared them for this holy 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 for his holy war. This can be applied to all believers. Whether or not they have some form of military training, they are God's army.

Today, God's army is still in a holy war. When Jesus said to his disciples: „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 sent his disciples into the holy war to spread out his kingdom to the ends of the earth. 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 2nd Timothy 2:3 he encouraged his spiritual son Timothy: „Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.“ Missionary Dr. Samuel Lee, the founder of UBF, often wore military clothes in America to remind the coworkers that they are God's army for world mission and are in the holy war against the deceptive Zeitgeist of complacency, and to renew their soldier spirit.

As long as we don't believe in Jesus, we strive ceaselessly for more comfort and better human conditions--just like secular people. But if we have received Jesus as our LORD and saviour, we experience that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle and that our Lord has recruited us as his soldiers in this war for his holy mission. This war leads us into some areas that are firmly in the hand of the time spirit. For this war God has made us his soldiers.

During the Japanese occupation of Korea, all people were forced to bow down to the Shinto shrine and worship the Emperor as

"God King". But Pastor Son Yang-won refused because of his faith in God. He was beaten brutally and thrown into prison for years. But his suffering was a victory in the war of God to conquer Korea with the gospel, and to bless the whole world through Korea with the gospel of Jesus death and resurrection. God also sends us today into this war, that is to fight against the Zeitgeist of Godless humanism that denies God, makes men the measure of all things, and deceives the young people in Europe blocking them from true freedom in Christ. Not only we, but also our coworkers and sheep and children are God's army, each one registered with his name and registered by God for war.

Last year, we experienced that those who took part in the Global Leadership Empowerment Forum with the next generation coworkers and sheep were used as a blessing at the International Summer Bible Conference and in their districts because they resisted the spirit of the times and accepted spiritual training. This war goes on until Jesus returns. The worst thing that we could do to ourselves and to the next generation is to desert and to invalidate God's grace in Jesus. In Germany one receives up to 5 years in prison for desertion, but in spiritual life, it means death. Each of us is a fighter for Christ in his holy war by the grace of God, and shares in his wonderful victory.

So upon what do victory and defeat depend for God's people? In short: whether or not God is in the middle of their lives. We want to think about what this means in two points.

First: The Levites were separated for service in the tabernacle.

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, but were set apart and appointed to for the service of the tabernacle of the covenant law. In an army during wartime, every single man is needed. But God set apart a whole tribe for service in the tabernacle--so important was the service for the tabernacle of God. According to verse 53, this service was the protection of the community from the wrath of God.

The appointment of the Levites to serve in the house of the law teaches us the importance of Bible study. The most precious thing that God's people possess is the presence of God in their midst. The Levites were given the privilege of guarding this precious treasure and defending it against all relativism. Through this, the Israelites learned to fear God and to live according to His Word. Over the past 39 years, we have experienced how important Bible study is for the spiritual survival, growth and fruitfulness of each individual and an entire church. Some churches have moved away from Bible study and have shifted their focus to human fellowship or social work; others follow because it sounds attractive. Unfortunately, we see that such churches do not divert the wrath of God, 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 the servant of God, the appointment of preachers and Bible teachers among the shepherds and the next generation, the daily fellowship of words, the writing of testimonies, the Bible conferences and Bible seminars. We were able to experience that God dwells in our midst. Ezra's example teaches us that Bible study is crucial in preparing for spiritual war. 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 only ridiculed in the Babylonian culture. 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 (Esr 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 with God in their midst. Let us prepare for victory in the holy war by devoting ourselves to intensive Bible study and placing God and His Word at the center of every community and fellowship. God will bless every Bible-centered community, dwell among them, and give them victory in the holy war.

Second, the tabernacle was also in the center during the journeys.

Let us look at chapter 2. Here we find the order of the Israelites during the camp and the journey. Let us read verse 2: "The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family." Let us also look at verses 3-9: "On the east, toward the sunrise, the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard. The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab. His division numbers 74,600. The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them. The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. His division numbers 54,400. The tribe of Zebulun will be next. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. His division numbers 57,400. The tribe of Zebulun will be next. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. His division numbers 57,400. All the men assigned to the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, number 186,500. They will set out first." Three tribes, each under their commanders, were grouped into a camp, one of which carried the banner. These four camps were set up around the tabernacle in the four points of the compass and were to set out in a certain order: first Judah with Issachar and Zebulun to the east, then Reuben with Simeon and Gad to the south, then Ephraim with Manasseh and Benjamin to the west, and finally Dan with Asher and Naphtali to the north. Then the Levites encamped in the middle around the tabernacle. Look at chapter 3:17. The Levites were divided into three family clans: The Gershonites, the Kohathites and the

Merarites. The Gershonites camped behind the dwelling to the west and took care of the dwelling and the tent and its blankets and the curtains and capes, in other words the textiles. The Kohathites camped in the south and were responsible for the ark, the table, the candlestick, the altars and all the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering. Finally, the Merarites camped in the north. They were entrusted with the largest and heaviest things, that is, the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment and everything related to their use, as well as the posts of the courtyard with their bases, tent pegs, and ropes.

When they marched out, they did so in order: Judah - Gershonites and Merarites - Reuben - Kohathites - Ephraim - Dan. By this camp and march order it was ensured that the tabernacle remained in the middle.

Each tribe had its own specific task. Every army needs such a fixed order. For every soldier and every unit there must be a clear position, task, affiliation and command structure. When I was doing my military service, my unit was the supply of the Staff Flying Group in Fighter Bomber Wing 33. So it was clear that we would not get our orders from the Navy and would not climb on tanks, but would support the pilots in their missions in the Tornado aircraft.

There is also a clear order for the church of God. God is in the middle. No matter where the church moves, God lives in the middle, because the church does not bow to the spirit of the times. As members of the church, we have a clear position in the history of salvation and a certain current task in God's holy war. At GLEF 2018 M. Paul Chung explained that UBF is part of the "Third Reformation". The first Reformation (Hus, Luther, etc.) led back to the Bible, the second, pietism, led back to holy life, the third (SVM, UBF, etc.) to the mobilization of the laity for world mission. In this history of God Bonn UBF has its position as a spiritual headquarter for the campus mission in Europe with responsibility also for the world mission and the mobilization of the next

generation. We do not fight like someone who strikes into the air, but with our fist against known opponents with concrete concerns. Above all, we fight by forming one-to-one Bible study teams. One-to-one Bible study team with a student fulfills the will of God for world mission. A one-to-one Bible study team with a student establishes the order of God and carries on the temple. At the Friday testimony meeting, a coworker confessed in her testimony that she recognized that her task before God was not to look after her child and her relatives and to work diligently, but to be a Bible teacher for German students. She is ready to carry the temple of God. We stand under the banner of campus mission in the clan of Bible teachers, in his holy war. Praise God for his order through which he stays in our middle and gives victory.

Let us look at chapters 3 and 4. The Levites aged one month or more were counted (3:15). Some think of the little children as "still children, too small". God says: 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. As seen, the Levites took care of the transport of the moving tabernacle. With which attitude should they do this? On the one hand, with a sense of ownership. If one of them left something lying, God could not be worshipped in God's way and not dwell in their midst. On the other hand, with holy fear. The furnishings were packed by the priests. 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). They were allowed to do it. In the books of Samuel we see that the Levites of Beth Shemesh (1 Sam 6:19) and Uzzah (2 Sam 6:7) incited the punishment of God upon them because they encountered the ark of God without fear and did not obey these commandments with reverent precision. God's people must have fear of God. God uses the service of those who do their duties with a sense of ownership and holy fear.

In chapters 1-4 we have seen that God prepared his people for war by dwelling in their centre. He ordered the Levites to serve and gave his people a clear camp and march order. We are facing the war of the spirits of humanism for the spiritual conquest and renewal in Germany and Europe. By dedicating ourselves with a sense of ownership to intensive Bible study and raising Bible teachers, God will conquer all faculties and universities and give victory.

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 duties of the tabernacle of the covenant law through the appointment of the Levites. Everyone had his clear position and task for camping and travelling. In chapters 5-9, before they set out, God gave his people some instructions that set God in the centre of their lives.

Chapter 5 mentions three concerns that the church should be mindful of and urgently address. 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 become 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 treated. When children see that God's church does not take care that the families in the church live as house churches, how can they learn to establish God- and mission-centered house churches for world mission? That is the reason why God's servants and maidservants fought uncompromisingly from the beginning for the coworkers to live God- and mis-

sion-centered lives, even though they themselves were slandered and given hostility for it. The church must be attentive to the creeping influence of such sins. In a church that consistently fights the influence of sin within while serving mission, God remains the center.

Chapter 6 contains the regulations for Nazirites. Nazirites are those who make a special vow to God to dedicate themselves to the Lord (6:2). As long as the vow lasts, they must abstain from wine, let their hair grow long, and not go near a dead body, not even a relative. These rules remind us of God's calling as missionaries and shepherds. By Jesus' grace we are called and dedicated to the Lord. The life of calling is a completely new life and has nothing more to do with the low desires of the old life. This calling is valid all our lives and only ends with our death, not with ill health, the birth of grandchildren, or retirement.

Verses 22 to 27 contain as an insertion the priestly blessing with which Aaron and his sons blessed the Israelites after him. The blessing is - following from the previous chapters - a spiritual blessing. It consists of God's blessing and protecting his people, making his grace shine upon them and giving them peace under his dominion.

Let's see chapter 7. Here we find the offerings of the tribal leaders for the dedication of the tabernacle. They first brought six carts with oxen for transport, of which the Gershonites received two carts for the textiles and the Merarites four for the frames and crossbars. Then each of the twelve tribal leaders brought his sacrifice on a certain day. Their sacrifices were all the same. Let's read, as an example, verses 13-17: "His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with the finest flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering; one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering; one male

goat for a sin offering; and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab." 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. It was important that everyone made the same sacrifice, regardless of the size of the tribes, their own possibilities or their personal tastes. Through their uniform sacrifice, they formed oneness. In addition to the purity of the church and the life with the calling of God, spiritual unity is decisive for the victory of the God's people.

By the regulation in 8:1-4 that the lamps should be set up so that they light up the area in front of the lampstand, God says that his light shines to the Israelites and how important their relationship to him is. Verses 5-26 describe the setting apart of the Levites. The church set the Levites apart on behalf of the firstborn. So the Levites belonged to God. Their duties ensured that the people was able to receive forgiveness through the sacrifice of the high priest (8:19).

The last preparation for setting out was the celebration of the Passover at the appointed time and according to the regulations of Genesis 12. The Passover reminded the Israelites of who the Lord was. Genesis 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.

Verses 15-23 describe how setting out, moving out, and encampment was to take place. The tabernacle was covered by a cloud. 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 Israel-

ites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp." God revealed his guidance through his word, which he gave them through Moses. 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.

Through his servant, we received God's word from Ezekiel 37:10 as God's direction: "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. If we say that God is at the center of our lives, but do not obey his command, we lie. How can we obey and follow God's guidance? We follow God's guidance through early morning prayer, having 1:1 Bible study teams on campus and coworking for GLEF, Spring Bible Conference and European Summer Bible Conference. By following God's guidance, we experience God's mighty work among young men as our ancestors of faith have experienced it. God will bless our obedience of faith to his guidance and he will make alive the dry bones of young men at every faculty and university in Bonn, St. Augustin, Rheinbach, Koblenz as his 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 commandment. God's army was

marching out to the Promised Land after the God's careful preparation. Moses invited his brother-in-law Hobab, who agreed after initial hesitation. This shows how much Moses, the shepherd of the people, respected a man. Hobab became the ancestor of Heber, the man of Jael, who killed the field captain Sisera and brought salvation to Israel.

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. So he ensured that he lived in their midst and that they could win the holy war. God also taught his people the importance of purity, life with calling, unity and remembering God's grace. When they were equipped, they set out by following his guidance.

Let us thank God for calling us for his holy war to set out with him in the center. May God help us to follow God's guidance and to gain the victory in the holy war of campus mission.