



God's Marching Order

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Part 1 – JUDAH

In Numbers 2:1-34, we see the order of the camp of Israel and how they marched. There was a very peculiar pattern to the way God had instructed them to do this, and a wonderful blessing is in store for each believer who realizes this plan of God. Remember that laws and rituals found in the Old Testament are wonderful types and patterns for God's ultimate plan of salvation and our Christian lives (see 1 Corinthians 10:11).

With this in mind let's take a look at the first Tribal group that was to lead out the marching order. What we'd like to do is to look first at the meanings of the names of the individuals, blessings given them by their father, Jacob, and then weave it all together in the marching order given by God to Moses. It all paints a wonderful picture for us to behold.

The first Tribal group was that of Judah. They led the way anytime they were on the move, and they also were instructed to camp on the East side of the Tabernacle. Remember, they only moved when the presence of God in the form of a smoky cloud lifted from the Tabernacle and began to move in a column (a pillar of a cloud by day and of fire by night – Exodus 13:21) – See Exodus 40:36-38. So, as long as the cloud of the Lord was upon the Tabernacle they camped in the order given them by Moses, and when the cloud was taken up they marched in their order.

The Tribal Group of Judah was made up of three tribes with Judah as the head of all three. Those tribes were Judah,

Issachar, and Zebulon. These were all three sons of Leah by Jacob. Judah was the fourth born, Issachar the ninth, and Zebulon the tenth. We've got to remember the struggle that went on between Leah and Rachel for the favor of Jacob. The one bearing the most sons was considered the favorite, although the Bible clearly tells us that Jacob loved Rachel (Genesis 29:30). Leah was always struggling for the favor of Jacob. And so, in Genesis 29 – 30 we see the conflict and struggle that resulted.

When Judah was born, thinking that now that she had given birth to four sons, surely Jacob would favor her and so she praised the Lord for this child. She thusly named him “Judah” – “Praised.” Later on, after both Rachel and Leah had given their handmaidens to Jacob to bear children in their place, Leah again bore children. Issachar was born and Leah exclaimed that God had given her hire (she had purchased that night with Jacob by giving Rachel some of the mandrakes her eldest son, Reuben, had found). She had been rewarded her wages and so she named him Issachar – “He will bring a Reward.”

Leah then bore another son after Issachar and named him Zebulon. God had blessed her abundantly and had given a good dowry giving her the right to live in Jacob's house and be a part of him, and so “Zebulon” literally means, “habitation.”

So we have “Praised,” “He will bring a Reward,” and “Habitation.” Now let's take a quick look at the blessings given at the end of Jacob's life to his children.

Much was said about Judah and you can read it in Genesis 49:8-12. Basically he said this: Judah was a lion's whelp (cub), that his brothers would bow down to him, he would be strong as a lion and fierce, he would not be overcome, that the scepter would not depart from him until Shiloh (a prophecy of the Messiah) had come, and that riches would be his.

Issachar was told that he was a strong donkey, bound under burden, and a servant to tribute (see Genesis 49:14-15) and Zebulon was called a “Haven of the sea” or a welcomed sea port (Genesis 49:13).

If you put all of these together, the meanings of their names and the blessing given by their father you get something like this: Praised, a Ruler, brings a reward, servant, and haven of habitation. All of these speak of characteristics of Christ. First in line is none other than Jesus Christ! He is the leader. He is the One out front taking the heat from any oncoming enemies. He is the Leader who takes us down the paths of righteousness.

Jesus Christ it to be praised (Romans 15:11). He is, without doubt, a ruler (1 Timothy 6:15), and He brings a reward (John 14:2-3). He is not only the King of kings but also a servant (Philippians 2:7). Jesus Christ is most definitely a haven of habitation (Matthew 11:28). He is become all these things for us, to lead us to safety and security in Himself.

So first and foremost we must put Christ first. He has given us many wonderful things to do and has great and magnificent plans for our lives, but we must put Him first. We must acknowledge that He is in charge, not us.

When Christ is placed first in God’s Marching Order, other things will begin to fall into place. I’m not saying that we’ll just go on our merry, rosy way with no worries or concerns, but I am saying that He will not lead us astray. When God’s glory begins to move from the Tabernacle, Christ leads on after the glory of God. When we actually and totally put Him first in our lives, our occupations, our desires, and our families, things will begin to happen in our lives.

Praise the Lord!

God's Marching Order Part 2 - REUBEN

In Part 1 of this study, we took the names of the first Tribal Group of Israel (the first in the marching order, made up of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon), looked at the meanings of their names and the blessing bestowed upon them by their father, Jacob, and “plugged” that information into the order of marching while enroute to “The Promised Land.” We don’t want to give the impression that we spiritualize everything the Bible says. These are wonderful historic facts, but we also know that the New Testament tells us that the things of the Old Testament were given to us as examples and types of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:11).

By doing this we discovered that the first Tribal Group in the marching order of Israel showed a wonderful picture of Christ. He is our Leader and we must follow Him.

We want to follow suit in this study and so we continue as with the first part by looking at the individual tribes in the second Tribal Group. This group was made up of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad.

Reuben was the very first son of Jacob by Leah. When Leah gave birth to him she literally said, “Look, a son!” (Genesis

29:32). And, believe it or not, that's what Reuben means – “Look! A son!”

Simeon was the second son of Leah and, again, referring to the struggle for the love of Jacob as we mentioned in part 1 of this study, when he was born Leah said, “The Lord has heard and answered” (Genesis 29:33). And that is what Simeon means, “The Lord has heard and answered.”

Gad was the first son of Jacob by Zilpah, Leah's servant. Remember, that in this struggle for love and favor for Jacob between Leah and her sister, Rachel, in the process of having children each gave their servant to Jacob to bear children in their place. After Rachel had not been successful in having children of her own, she was the first to do this. Leah had stopped bearing children for the time and when she saw what Rachel had done, she decided to do the same thing. So Zilpah gave birth to Gad. Apparently Leah thought this was going to be an opportunity for many more sons and so she said, “A troop is coming” (Genesis 30:11). So Gad means “troop.”

In Genesis 49, Jacob, on his death bed, called his sons in for a prophetic message. Because Reuben had dishonored Jacob by going in to Bilhah, the servant of Rachel (see Genesis 35:22), he said that Reuben was “unstable as water” and “shall not excel” (Genesis 49:3-4).

Simeon and Levi received the same prophetic words from Jacob. It was these two who killed and plundered in the city of Shechem for the defilement of their sister, Dinah (see Genesis 34). Jacob said that Simeon and Levi were “instruments of cruelty” and that they would be divided in Israel (Genesis 49:5-7). It is interesting to note that Simeon's portion in the Promised Land was contained in the limits of Judah's portion and eventually this tribe was consumed in Judah. Levi's descendants were assigned the priesthood and they were scattered in all parts of Israel.

Gad, who's name means "troop," was told that he would be overcome by a troop, but that he would triumph in the end (Genesis 49:19). Historically, the tribe of Gad did spend a lot of time in servitude of the people they were to drive out of their inheritance, but they finally did overcome.

Now let's try to "plug" all of this information into the Marching Order of God for Israel. The Tribal Group of Reuben was second in the marching order and camped on the South side of the perimeter. Even though Reuben was technically the firstborn, he was honored second. If we put all of this information about their names and prophecies together we get something like this: "Look! A son, unstable as water, who cannot excel, but the Lord heard and answered and even though he has been an instrument of cruelty, scattered, and overcome by a multitude of things in the end he shall overcome."

What a picture of man! Yes, the second Tribal Group represents mankind. Though we were created perfect, because of our instability we sinned against God and fell from His grace. Throughout history we have sought peace but, sadly, all we have really accomplished is to be called "instruments of cruelty." We have been scattered and we cannot excel. But the Lord heard and answered our cries. Even though we are overcome by the devil and evil, we can become over-comers by following Christ.

So, Christ is first. He must lead in the march to victory. Even though we have miserably failed God, if we will follow His provision in Christ, and continue to follow Him, He will lead us to victory.

Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ. I don't mind following His lead for I know that He will lead us in the right paths. He is the "Good Shepherd" of the twenty-third Psalm. He will lead us into green pastures and beside still waters. He may, at times lead

us through the valley of the shadow of death but we need not fear evil, for we are following Him and He is with us.

The second in the Marching Order of God is none other than us. We'll never succeed in life without following Christ. It may appear as so, but it will not ultimately happen. To escape the final enemy of death (1 Corinthians 15:52-58) we must follow Christ.

I have decided to follow Jesus. I know you have too.

Praise the Lord!

God's Marching Order Part 3 - LEVI

Third in the marching order of God was the tribe of Levi, which had been assigned the priesthood, and the responsibility of the Tabernacle. It's funny how God thinks sometimes. But we have to remember that when God thinks He doesn't just look at the present and what has happened in the past but He looks at what He knows the future will be. We can look to the future but we can only do that speculatively. God knows what we will be, who we will be, and what we will accomplish.

He knew this about Levi. Let's follow suit with the last two parts of God's Marching Order and take a look at just who Levi was. Levi was the third son of Jacob by Leah (Genesis 29:34). Again looking at the struggle for the love of Jacob between Leah and Rachel we see Leah making a statement conceived from this strained relationship. She was the unwanted wife. Her father had tricked Jacob into taking her as his wife and Jacob kept her out of obligation, but not out of love. The Bible tells us that Jacob loved Rachel (Genesis 29:18). Leah was no fool. She knew what had happened and she was as much trapped in this situation as Jacob was. But I believe that she had learned to love Jacob. She longed for more than a physical relationship with

this man. Even though she had to share him with her sister, Rachel, she wanted him to love her.

When Levi was born she basically said, “I have given him three sons and now he will be joined with me.” This was a result of her deep, heart-felt desire.

However, later on when Jacob was pronouncing his last words upon his sons, he said this about Levi, “Levi is an instrument of cruelty and he will be divided in Israel” (Genesis 49:5-7). Along with his brother Simeon, Levi, also a hothead, had joined with his brother in destroying the town of Shechem because of the defilement of his sister, Dinah (You can read this story in Genesis 34). They insisted that all the men of Shechem be circumcised, then waited until the third day after their circumcision when they were all so sore they couldn’t fight, then entered the city and killed all the men, destroyed the town, and pillaged it. Jacob had regretted their actions and moved in fear of the rest of the inhabitants of that land.

When God had used Moses to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, the tribe of Levi was chosen to be the servants of the Tabernacle and was made priests. Why? If Levi had been such a rotten individual, why would God use him to lead the rest of the people in worship? This didn’t seem like much of a punishment. But once again, God knows the future about us and doesn’t just look at the past or present (thank God for that!). They were not given a particular inheritance because God had said that He would take the Levites instead of the firstborn of the male children (Numbers 3:12). Other than a few cities and a portion of land within the cities they ministered, they were not given inheritance with the rest of the tribes.

As they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, the Levites camped around the Tabernacle. When they moved, they were the ones who packed up all the articles of worship and

sacrifice, and transported them in the march. The Tabernacle and the Levites were located always in the center of the camp. It was so when they camped, and it was so when they marched.

Now let's try to bring the point to home. There is not a one of us who has not been an instrument of cruelty. Some perhaps more than others, but we are all guilty (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12). We are all guilty. Yet, despite our guilt, just as Levi means "joined together" so we have been joined together with God through Christ despite our evils and cruelty. Levi paints a wonderful picture of what God has given us in our Salvation experience by faith in the grace of Christ Jesus.

Also, the Tabernacle and the camp of the Levites was always at the center of the entire camp of Israel. They were always near the place of worship. Just so, in our march for the Lord, just as Christ is first, and we follow Him, so the Worship of God must always be at the center of our Christian experience. Our worship of God is a most important aspect of our Christian relationship. Time spent with God is extremely important time.

Regardless the length it is the quality that counts. A quick verse and a mumbled prayer will not suffice. Time spent with God is very important but if it is the length that we brag about, then that too is vain. What we need to do is spend quality time with God. This is time when He has our attention and full focus. It is not to be bragged about because it is special time with the Father. Nor is it to be taken lightly because it is the moments in which we grow close to our Father.

Group worship in Church gatherings, regardless of your denomination are wonderful times. It is commanded that we not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Worship time as a group is important, whether you believe in a very quiet time of worship or something a little more freely. That isn't the issue here. The devil would love for us to get into a

debate of which is right. I say it isn't the form but the act of doing it. Yet, while group worship is important and commanded, that quality time one on One with the Father is much needed. The very fact that it is lacking in many Christian experiences should tell us that the devil will do anything and everything he can to stop it.

Jesus knew the importance of it. How often in the Gospels do we read of Him parting from the multitudes to find quiet time with God? It was important and coveted time for Him.

As we grow in our relationship with God we will find ourselves longing for more and more of this special time, for it is time that we enter the "court" of the Almighty God and worship Him.

We must have Christ leading us. Despite our despicable background, we come after Him. He knows where He is taking us. But we must keep our worship of Him at our very core, in the center of our life.

Praise the Lord!.

God's Marching Order

Part 4 - EPHRAIM

Fourth in the Marching order of Israel was the Tribal Group of Ephraim. This group was made up of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. Note that all of these are descendants of the only two sons born to Jacob by Rachel.

In order to really grasp all of this, we need to look first at Joseph himself. Joseph was the first son born to Jacob by Rachel, the wife he truly loved. Rachel had no children up until this time except through her hand maiden, Bilhah. In Genesis 30:24 we read the account of the birth of Joseph. Rachel was so happy to finally have a son on her own that she exclaimed, "May God give me another son." She wasn't satisfied yet. So Joseph means, "Let Him add."

Rachel did give birth to a second son but it resulted in her own death. While traveling from the House of Laban in Canaan back to the land God had led Abraham too, and back to his father, Isaac's household, Rachel gave birth to her second and last son. In her dying moments she named him "Benoni" meaning, "Son of my Sorrow." Even though Jacob was greatly grieved at the death of Rachel, he had no intention of remembering her in Benjamin as "Son of Sorrow," and so he quickly renamed him "Benjamin" meaning "Son of my Right Hand" (see Genesis 35:18).

Joseph very quickly became the favorite son of Jacob. This was wrong for him to give so much extra attention to one son out of twelve for it caused all his other brothers to hate him. Jacob went as far as to award Joseph with the “coat of many colors” which designated him as the main heir and gave him leadership over his brothers (see Genesis 37). As a result, when the opportunity came, Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave and he wound up in Egypt. We obviously can’t relate the full story here, but read it for yourself in Genesis 37 – 50).

While in Egypt, after being promoted as the second ruler of the land under Pharaoh, Joseph had two sons. The firstborn was Manasseh. God had turned a bad situation for Joseph into one of blessing (isn’t that just like God?). When Manasseh was born, Joseph, in praise to God, said, “God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” (MJKV – Genesis 41:51). So the name “Manasseh” means “Causing to forget.”

Later on, Ephraim was born. Joseph praised God for making him fruitful and so Ephraim means “double fruit” (Genesis 41:52).

Now that we have examined the meanings of the names of those making up the Tribal Group of Ephraim, let’s look at the blessings bestowed upon them by Jacob before his death.

In reference to Joseph, Jacob had many things to say about his firstborn by Rachel. It was all good. We will sum it up in this: “Joseph is a fruitful bough by a well whose branches run over wall. He was shot at by the archers, but his own bow didn’t fall short. He was made strong by God, nourished by God, and the blessings of his father prevailed” (Genesis 49:22-26). Of course, all of this was very true of Joseph. Even though his own brothers sold him into slavery to be rid of him, God used it for his good and made

him a great ruler who ultimately saved the lives of many, including his own family.

Jacob referred to Benjamin in this way; he compared him to be ravenous as a wolf, devoured away in the morning, and at night divide spoil” (Genesis 49:27).

Sometime before this, Jacob called a private meeting with Joseph and his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. In this private session with them he told Joseph that he was going to regard his two sons as his own, and in this way give Joseph two portions of the inheritance rather than one. This carried over into the Tribal arrangements of Israel and instead of one tribe named for Joseph there were two named for his sons.

However, when Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, even though his eyes were dim and Joseph had carefully guided his boys so that the elder, Manasseh would be at Jacob’s right hand and the younger, Ephraim at Jacob’s left hand. This was the appropriate and approved way of blessing these boys. Jacob, knowing the future that God had allowed him to see, and I believe influenced slightly by his own self as being blessed instead of Esau, crossed his hands so that his right hand was on Ephraim and his left on Manasseh. In this was the greatest blessing was given to the younger son (Genesis 48).

Upon Ephraim and Manasseh was given this blessing: “Let them grow like the fishes into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” (Genesis 48:16). When Joseph protested because of Jacob’s right hand being on Ephraim, Jacob told him that both boys would be great, but the younger would be greater than the older. This became true in action as well as the size of each tribe.

Now let’s put it all together. He will add; fruitful even to double fruit; growing into a multitude; we were once the son of God’s sorrow but now the sons of His right hand. This facet of

God's Marching Order shows that after we have determined to follow Christ, always putting ourselves after Him and then put the worship of God at the center of our lives and Christian experience then we will experience fruitfulness. Fruitfulness in spreading His Gospel and, as a consequence to serving Him, blessings upon our own lives.

We can't help it. When we fill our lives with Christ and the worship of Him, we must be active in spreading His Gospel. We want to let others in on the freedom, the love, the mercy, and all the good He brings. He becomes our first thought. Our attitudes change from bad to good. Our song changes from "Woe is Me" to "Amazing Grace" and "Praise His Name!" He actually makes us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We will also experience the blessings of God. I firmly believe that God wants good things for His people. He wants what He knows to be best for them. Now that doesn't mean that we will always have an abundance of money, or drive the best cars. It doesn't mean that we will live in a luxurious house. But it does mean that He will give us what He knows we can handle and what will not bring temptation to us.

We've had it backwards all too often. Again, God will bless us abundantly (John 10:10). The problem is our interpretation of that promise. We try to make it mean what we want it to mean. I tell you that God will bless us in proportion to our needs and what He knows to be good for us. His blessings are a by-product of serving Him, not the reason we serve Him.

So, we follow Christ, put the worship of God at the center of our life, and this results in an increase of our witness for God and we receive the by-product of His blessings. What an arrangement!

Praise the Lord!

God's Marching Order

Part 5 - DAN

In the final part of “God’s Marching Order” we will take a look at the last Tribal Group of Dan. As with the other parts, let’s first look at the meanings of the names of the three Tribes in this group, then at the last words spoken over them by their father, Jacob. We will then put this information together with their Tribal Group to see the final message of God in this order. The Tribal Group of Dan was made up of the three tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

Dan was the fifth son of Jacob mothered by Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah. He was actually the first son by this proxy mother. In the great struggle between Rachel and Leah to give Jacob sons and thus win his favor, Rachel had been, so far, barren. She got this idea to give her handmaid, Bilhah to Jacob to bear children in her place and so give sons to her husband. As stated in previous lessons, this seems strange and immoral to us, but was a commonly accepted practice in Biblical days. As her son was born, she stated that God had judged her, and so she called the boy “Dan” which means “Judged” (See Genesis 30:6).

Asher was the eighth son of Jacob and was mothered by Leah’s handmaid, Zilpah. Again in review, after Leah had given

Jacob four sons herself, she stopped getting pregnant. By this time Rachel had given Jacob two sons by her handmaid, Bilhah, and so Leah decided that it was time she get back into the picture. She too gave her handmaid, Zilpah to Jacob to bear children in her place. Asher was the second son by Zilpah. At Asher's birth, Leah stated that the daughters would call her blessed so she said, "Happy am I!" So "Asher" means "Happy" (Genesis 30:13).

The second son of Rachel by Bilhah was Naphtali who was also the sixth son of Jacob. As Naphtali was born Rachel stated, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed . . ." (Genesis 30:8). You can see in her words the great struggle that divided the two sisters. So the name "Naphtali" means "My Wrestling."

Putting the names together we have "Judge," "Happy," and "My Wrestling." Now let's take a look at what Jacob had to say about these three sons upon his deathbed. In Genesis 49:16-18, Jacob said this in summary of Dan: "He shall judge his people; he is like a serpent by the way, and an adder in the path that bites the horses heels, causing the rider to fall." When Jacob spoke of Asher he basically said this: "His food is fat (or rich), and he will yield royal dainties" (Genesis 49:20). And of Naphtali Jacob said: "Naphtali is a hind (or deer) let loose and he gives good words" (Genesis 49:21).

Putting all of this together now, we get a picture of what God has for us in this last Tribal Group in God's Marching Order. By way of review, we have Christ pictured as leading the way in the Tribal Group of Judah. Then, we see man in the Tribal Group of Reuben, lost without Christ, but doing okay as long as we follow Him. Next we see in Levi that we must make our worship of God the center of our lives, just as Levi took care of the Tabernacle and led the rest of Israel in the worship of God. Fourthly, we see a fruitful increase both of souls and blessings in

the Tribal Group of Ephraim which comes as a result of following Christ and worshipping Him.

Now we see in the last part, Dan – Judgment, a serpent in the way causing the rider to fall, Asher – Happy, yielding royal dainties and rich provision, and Naphtali – My Wrestling, but free as a deer let loose and giving forth good words.

Because of our following Christ and worshipping Him, we have escaped the final judgment that will surely cause us to fall. We have no choice. Without Christ we are doomed to eternal judgment. But because of Him and our choice to accept Him as our personal Savior, this judgment has been turned to happiness and blessing. He has given us eternal life to feast upon. Our wrestling for the answers to life have been turned like a deer let loose and we give forth the good Word of God.

Brothers and sisters, this is God's Marching Order for us. Follow Christ, even though we are depraved humanity, because of Him and only because of Him we have hope! Make Him the center of your worship. Worship is very important. After all, that's what we were created to do. When we put Christ first in our journey and our worship, then we want to tell of Him. We want to become fruitful in spreading the Word. As a by-product, we become blessed in the kingdom. We have escaped the final judgment of eternal death in Christ and are made free indeed!

Praise the Lord!