

# T05

## ORGANIZING THE CAMP IN THE WILDERNESS

In a previous study we looked at the way in which spatial arrangements in the earthly tabernacle reflected spatial arrangements in heaven. In this study we will show that the relationship between the heavenly and the earthly goes much farther than the Tabernacle. The whole camp of Israel in the Wilderness was a shadow of Heavenly realities.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt they settled at Mount Sinai while the temple and its furniture were constructed and God delivered to them the details of the performance of the rituals within it.

In preparation for the conquest of the Promised Land God gave instructions to Moses in the “Tent of Meeting” on the first day of the second month in the second year after they had come out of Egypt (Numbers 1:1). This involved two important and related activities.

- First the fighting men of Israel were counted
- Second the camp was organized.

The organizing of the camp determined the order of marching and the numbering of the fighting men was preliminary to the fighting that the conquest of Canaan would involve.

### I. THE NUMBERING OF THE FIGHTING MEN OF ISRAEL:

The entry of Israel into Canaan would require that the Canaanites be dispossessed of their land. Therefore the Lord commanded Moses to take a census of all the fighting men of Israel. Instructions were given in Numbers 1.

#### Numbers 1:1

“Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel  
by families,  
by father’s houses,  
according to the number of names,  
every male,  
head by head;  
from 20 years and upward,  
all in Israel  
who are able to go forth to war.”

(See also 1:18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42)

So Moses and Aaron, accompanied by the “leaders of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the clans of Israel” commenced their task. (see 1:4-16)

When it was completed they discovered that there were 603,550 fighting men within the camp. (1:46)

The Levites were not numbered for they were appointed to care for the tabernacle and its furnishings and were to encamp around the tabernacle (1:47-51a). This sacred responsibility was theirs and theirs alone. God commanded “If anyone else comes near. He shall be put to death” (1:51).

### II. THE ORGANIZING OF THE CAMP OF THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS.

The organizing of the Camp of Israel in the Wilderness is recorded in Numbers 2, 3.

#### Numbers 2:2

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,  
**‘The people of Israel shall encamp  
each by his own standard,**

with the ensigns of their fathers' houses;  
**they shall encamp facing the tent of meeting  
on every side**".

So the people of Israel were to camp by their own standards on each side of the Tent of Meeting. Their dwelling tents were to face the Tent of Meeting on each side.

NOTE: The three tribes allocated to each side were placed as follows:

The FIRST NAMED – in the central position  
The SECOND named: "the Son of the Right Hand" – to the right  
The THIRD named: "to Son of the Left Hand" – To the left.

**a. The Tribes on the EAST SIDE of the Tabernacle:**

**Numbers 2:3 – 9**  
"3 On the **east side**,  
**toward the rising of the sun**,  
those of the standard of the forces with **Judah**  
shall camp according to their armies . . .  
5 "Those who camp next to him  
*shall be* the tribe of **Issachar**, . . .  
7 "Then *comes* the tribe of **Zebulun** . . .  
. 9 "All who were numbered .  
according to their armies of the forces with Judah . . .  
***these shall break camp first.***

So three tribes were to pitch their tents on the eastern side of the Tabernacle – the tribes of Judah (2:4), Issachar (2:5) and Zebulun (2:7). These faced the gate of the Tabernacle.

It is important to note here that this order of camping was also the order of marching. Numbers 2:9 records "these shall break camp first". So on the march through the wilderness towards Canaan Judah was to lead, followed by Issachar and then Zebulun.

**b. The Tribes on the SOUTH SIDE of the Tabernacle**

**Numbers 2:10-15**  
"On the **south side**  
*shall be* the standard of the forces with **Reuben**  
according to their armies . . .  
2 "Those who camp next to him  
*shall be* the tribe of **Simeon** . . .  
14 "Then *comes* the tribe of **Gad** . . .  
16 . . . ***they shall be the second to break camp.***

The three tribes that pitched their tents on the southern side of the Tabernacle were Reuben (2:10), Simeon (2:12) and Gad (2:14). These were the second group to break camp. Reuben was to take the lead after Zebulun. He was to be followed by Simeon and then Gad

**c. The Tribes on the WEST SIDE of the Tabernacle.**

**Numbers 2:18 – 24**  
"18 "On the **west side**  
*shall be* the standard of the forces with **Ephraim**  
according to their armies . . .  
20 "Next to him *comes* the tribe of **Manasseh** . . .  
22 "Then *comes* the tribe of **Benjamin** . . .  
24 . . . ***they shall be the third to break camp.***

The three tribes that pitched their tents to the west of the tabernacle were Ephraim (2:18), Manasseh (2:20) and Benjamin (2:22). Their tents were therefore at the back of the Tabernacle. These tribes were the third to break camp. Thus the tribe of Gad was followed by the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin.

**Note:** we will see in our study of the Levites that the Priests and the Levites actually marched in the central position between Gad and Ephraim

**d. The Tribes on the NORTH SIDE of the Tabernacle.**

**Numbers 2:25 – 29**

<sup>25</sup> “The standard of the forces with **Dan** shall be on **the north side** according to their armies . . .

<sup>27</sup> “Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of **Asher** . . .

<sup>29</sup> “Then comes the tribe of **Naphtali** . . .

<sup>31</sup> . . . **they shall break camp last**, with their standards.”

The three tribes that pitched their tents to the north of the tabernacle were Dan (2:25), Asher (2:27) and Naphtali (2:29). They were on the side closest to the Table of Shewbread in the Holy Place. These three tribes formed the fourth block and travelled in the above order at the tail end of the tribes when they were in transit during the wilderness.

**e. The Position of the Tabernacle during the march through the wilderness.**

**Numbers 2:17**

<sup>17</sup> “And the **tabernacle of meeting** shall move out with the **camp of the Levites**

**in the middle of the camps;**

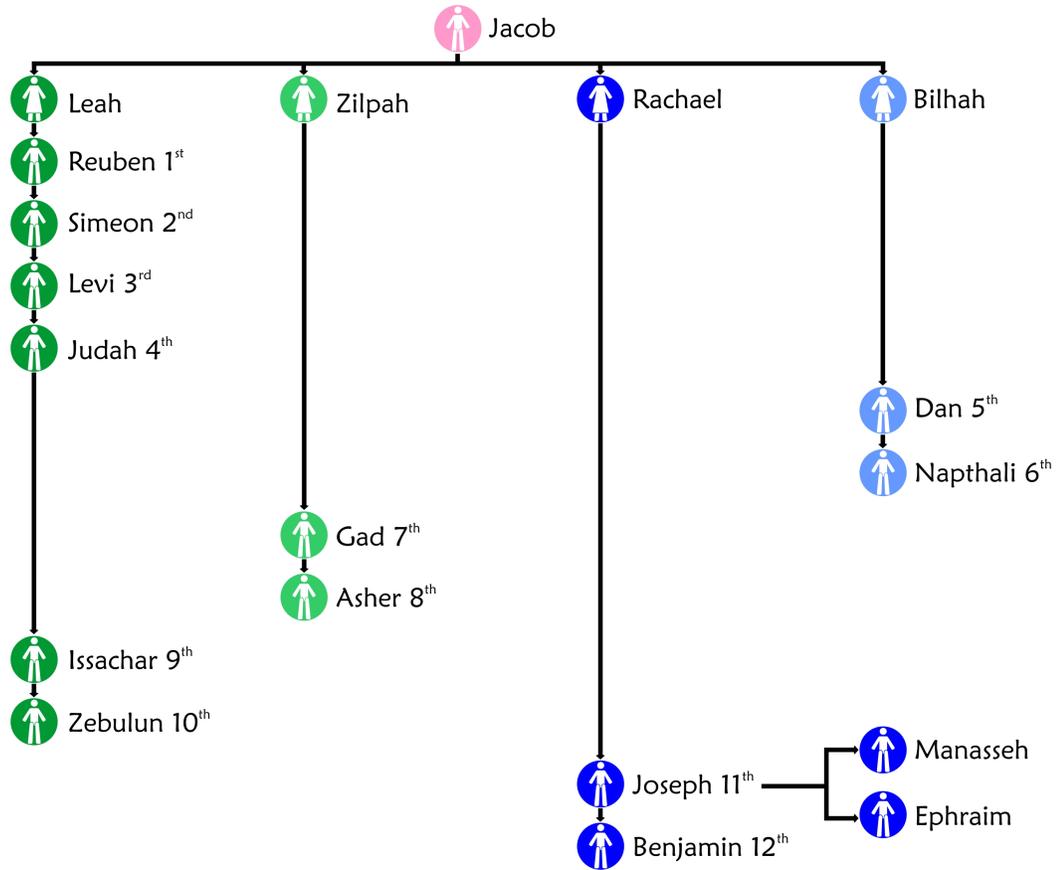
as they camp,  
so they shall move out,  
everyone in his place,  
by their standards.

The Levites who transported the Tabernacle and its furniture travelled in the midst of the twelve tribes. Thus the centrality of the Tabernacle was always maintained. When the tribes were settled the Tabernacle was in their midst. When the tribes were moving, the Tabernacle was in their midst. Thus the centrality of God in the lives of His people was taught in a very practical way.

### **III. THE UNDERLYING ORDER OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE TRIBES.**

This placement of the tribes makes sense when one considers the women from which they descended. The twelve tribes of Israel were fathered by Jacob through four women:

- **Leah** – Reuben (1<sup>st</sup> born), Simeon (2<sup>nd</sup> born); Levi (3<sup>rd</sup> born), Judah (4<sup>th</sup> born), Issachar (9<sup>th</sup> born), Zebulun (10<sup>th</sup> born)
- **Zilpah** (handmaid of Leah) – Gad (7<sup>th</sup> born), Asher (8<sup>th</sup> born)
- **Rachael** – Joseph (11<sup>th</sup> born) whose two sons were Ephraim and Manasseh; Benjamin (12<sup>th</sup> born)
- **Bilhah** (handmaid of Rachael) – Dan (7<sup>th</sup> born), Naphtali (6<sup>th</sup> born)



Now the groupings of the tribes on the four sides of the sanctuary can be clarified:

On the EAST side were the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun – the three last sons of Leah. So these were full brothers, having the same mother (Leah) as well as father.

On the SOUTH side were the tribes of Reuben with Simeon and Gad – the first two sons of Leah with the first born son of Zilpah, her handmaid. Zilpah bore her sons on behalf of her mistress. So though in reality Gad was a half-brother he would have been socially considered as a real brother to Reuben and Simeon.

On the WEST side were the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh with Benjamin. Manasseh and Benjamin were sons of Joseph. They were given tribal status to make up the twelve tribes as Levi was removed by God from the list of lay tribes. These three tribes – Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin were sons of Rachael and were therefore full brothers.

On the NORTH side were the tribes of Dan with Naphtali and Asher. Dan and Naphtali were sons of Bilhah, handmaid of Rachael with Asher, son of Zilpah, the handmaid of Leah.

Thus tribal locations around the sanctuary basically reflect the relationships within the family of Jacob:

Gad	Reuben	Simeon
Zebulun		Manasseh
Judah	SANCTUA	Ephraim
Issachar	RY	Benjamin
Asher	Dan	Naphtali

## IMPORTANT LESSONS TO BE LEARNED:

Lessons of importance were thus impressed upon the twelve tribes in a very practical way.

First, that the God they worshipped is a God of order - man gets his ability to organize because he is made after the creator. The book of numbers reveals this organizing ability of God.

Second, each of the tents faced or opened towards the sanctuary. Thus each morning as the people left their tents for the activities of the day they first faced the sanctuary. Life is to begin each day with our faces towards the sanctuary. No activities should occur unless first we have faced the sanctuary in our personal devotions:

Numbers 2:2

"The people of Israel shall encamp each by his own standard, with the ensigns of their father's houses; they shall encamp facing the tent of meeting on every side."

Third, when the tribes camped, their tents were some distance away from the Tabernacle. T

Numbers 2:2

"Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they **shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.**"

Thus the separating power of sin and the holiness of God was taught by the spatial arrangements made in the camp.

Fourth, when the tribes were on the march, the sanctuary maintained the same central position as it did when they were encamped. Thus the Israelites were taught that they were to live lives that centred on the sanctuary.

## IV. THE POSITION OF THE TABERNACLE WITHIN THE CAMP OF ISRAEL:

The census of the fighting men of Israel did not include the tribe of the Levites. God has separated them out to himself.

Numbers 1:47 - 53

"<sup>47</sup> But **the Levites** were **not numbered** among them by their fathers' tribe; <sup>48</sup> for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: <sup>49</sup> "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; <sup>50</sup> but you **shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle.** <sup>51</sup> **And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up . . .** <sup>53</sup> but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony."

The Levites were therefore given special responsibilities with regard to the tabernacle and its furnishings. In Numbers 3 the specific arrangements for the Levites are recorded.

Numbers 3:17

"<sup>17</sup> These were the sons of Levi by their names: **Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.**

The Levites were then divided according to their descent from the sons of Levi. Each was placed in a specific location and was allotted specific tasks:

***The GERSHONITES camped to the WEST, behind the tabernacle:***

**Numbers 3:23 – 26**

"The families of the **Gershonites** were to camp behind the tabernacle **westward.** . . .

<sup>25</sup> The duties of the children of Gershon  
in the tabernacle of meeting  
*included* **the tabernacle, the tent with its covering,**  
**the screen for the door of the tabernacle** of meeting,  
<sup>26</sup> **the screen for the door of the court,**  
**the hangings of the court**  
which *are* around the tabernacle and the altar,  
and **their cords**,  
according to all the work relating to them.

The Gershonites cared for the coverings, screens, cords and hangings of the tabernacle. They would take these down, fold and transport them and re-hang them once the frame of the tabernacle had been erected.

### ***The KOHATHITES camped on the SOUTH side of the Tabernacle***

#### **Numbers 3:29, 31**

<sup>29</sup> The families of the children of **Kohath**  
were to camp on **the south side** of the tabernacle. . . .  
<sup>31</sup> Their duty *included* the **ark**, the **table**, the **lampstand**,  
the **altars**, the **utensils** of the sanctuary  
with which they ministered,  
the **screen**,  
and all the work relating to them.

The Kohathites were responsible for the furniture of the sanctuary and all the utensils associated with them. They are the ones who would transport these items each time the tabernacle was moved and would set them up in their appropriate places. They would service the furniture and maintain it

### ***The MERARITES camped on the north side of the tabernacle***

#### **Numbers 3:33 – 37**

<sup>33</sup> . . . the families of **Merari**. . . .  
<sup>35</sup> . . . *were* to camp on the **north side** of the tabernacle.  
<sup>36</sup> And the appointed duty of the children of Merari  
*included* the **boards of the tabernacle**,  
its **bars**, its **pillars**, its **sockets**, its **utensils**,  
all the work relating to them,  
<sup>37</sup> and the **pillars of the court** all around,  
with their **sockets**, their **pegs**, and their **cords**.

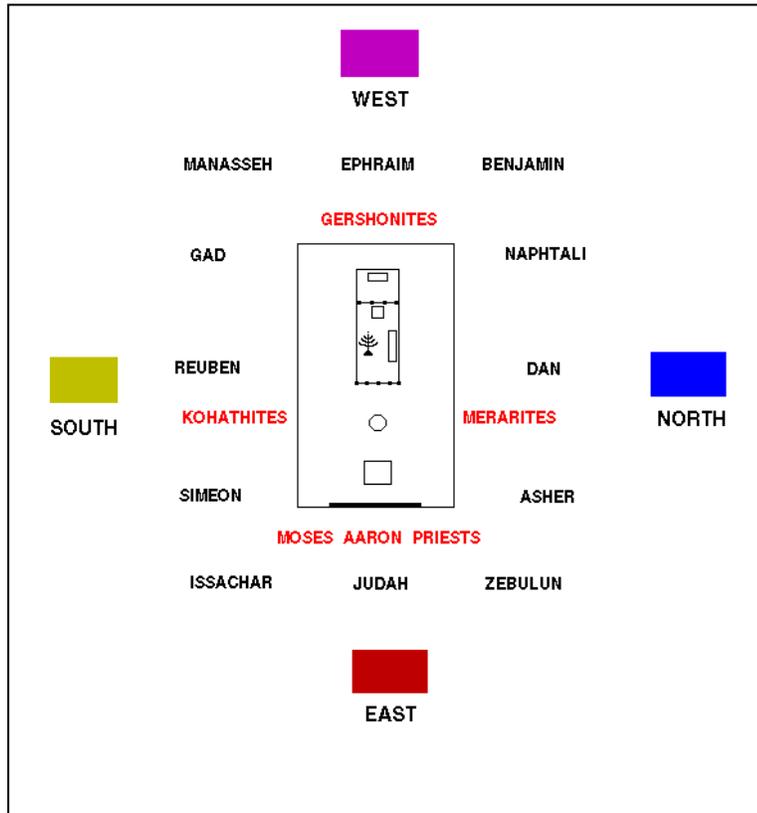
The Merarites would dismantle, transport and reassemble the framework of the tabernacle. This included the boards and bars of the tabernacle with its pillars, sockets, pegs and cords.

### ***MOSES, AARON and HIS SONS were to camp on the EAST before the Tabernacle***

#### **Numbers 3:38**

<sup>38</sup> Moreover those who were to camp  
before the tabernacle on the east,  
before the tabernacle of meeting,  
*were* Moses, Aaron, and his sons,  
keeping charge of the sanctuary,  
to meet the needs of the children of Israel . . .”

So the Priests and the Levites formed four smaller encampments, one on each side of the tabernacle. These were placed between the tabernacle and the lay tribes allotted to each side. The Gershonites, Kohathites and Merarites were the LEVITES. They attended to the physical aspects of the Tabernacle. The Sons of Aaron were the PRIESTS – they attended to the ritual of the Sanctuary.



## CONCLUSION:

The God of Israel is therefore a God of Order. Every aspect of the camp is laid out in a way that facilitates the functioning of the camp when it is moving through the wilderness. Each tribe had its place for resting and its position in moving. Each of the groups of Levites had its place for resting and its responsibilities in the disassembling, transport and reassembling of the tabernacle.

God expects in His church that we are organized and ordered for an economical functioning of the church reflects to the World what God is and thus brings honor and glory to Him.

# CAMP OF ISRAEL

North



West



East



South

## THE CAMP OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

Numbers 1:1-4, 47-54 (NKJV)	Numbers 2:1-34 (NKJV)	Numbers 3:5 - 38
<p>Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first <i>day</i> of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: <sup>2</sup>“Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, <sup>3</sup>from twenty years old and above—all who <i>are able to</i> go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. <sup>4</sup>And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father’s house. . .</p> <p><sup>47</sup> But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers’ tribe; <sup>48</sup>for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: <sup>49</sup>“Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; <sup>50</sup>but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. <sup>51</sup>And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. <sup>52</sup>The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; <sup>53</sup>but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”</p>	<p>And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>2</sup>“Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father’s house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.</p> <p><sup>3</sup>On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies . . . <sup>5</sup>“Those who camp next to him <i>shall be</i> the tribe of Issachar . . . <sup>7</sup>“Then <i>comes</i> the tribe of Zebulun . . . <sup>9</sup>. . . these shall break camp first.</p> <p><sup>10</sup>“On the south side <i>shall be</i> the standard of the forces with Reuben . . . <sup>12</sup>“Those who camp next to him <i>shall be</i> the tribe of Simeon . . . <sup>14</sup>“Then <i>comes</i> the tribe of Gad . . . <sup>16</sup>“ . . . they shall be the second to break camp.</p> <p><sup>17</sup>“And the tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps; as they camp, so they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards.</p> <p><sup>18</sup>“On the west side <i>shall be</i> the standard of the forces with Ephraim . . . <sup>20</sup>“Next to him <i>comes</i> the tribe of Manasseh . . . <sup>22</sup>“Then <i>comes</i> the tribe of Benjamin . . . <sup>24</sup>. . . they shall be the third to break camp.</p> <p><sup>25</sup>“The standard of the forces with Dan <i>shall be</i> on the north side . . . <sup>27</sup>“Those who camp next to him <i>shall be</i> the tribe of Asher . . . <sup>29</sup>“Then <i>comes</i> the tribe of</p>	<p><sup>5</sup>And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>6</sup>“Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. <sup>7</sup>And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. <sup>8</sup>Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. <sup>9</sup>And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they <i>are</i> given entirely to him<sup>[a]</sup> from among the children of Israel. <sup>10</sup>So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.” . . . <sup>14</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: <sup>15</sup>“Number the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.” . . .</p> <p><sup>16</sup>So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded. <sup>17</sup>These were the sons of Levi by their names: <b>Gershon</b>, <b>Kohath</b>, and <b>Merari</b>. . . <sup>23</sup>The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. . . <sup>25</sup>The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting <i>included</i> the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, <sup>26</sup>the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which <i>are</i> around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them. . .</p>

<sup>54</sup> Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did.

Naphtali . . . <sup>31</sup> . . . they shall break camp last, with their standards.”

<sup>33</sup> But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>34</sup> Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers’ houses.

<sup>29</sup> The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. <sup>30</sup> And the leader of the fathers’ house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. <sup>31</sup> Their duty *included* the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them.

<sup>32</sup> And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *was to be* chief over the leaders of the Levites, *with oversight* of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

<sup>35</sup> . . . the families of Merari . . . *were* to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. <sup>36</sup> And the appointed duty of the children of Merari *included* the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them, <sup>37</sup> and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.

<sup>38</sup> Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, *were* Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. . .