

Numbers 10:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And over the host of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethaneel the son of Zuar.

Analysis

And over the host of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethaneel the son of Zuar. This verse is part of the detailed record of Israel's tribal organization during wilderness wanderings. The phrase "over the host" (al-tzeva, אֶל־צֶבָא) indicates military command—each tribe was organized as an army unit under designated leadership. "Host" (tzava, צָבָא) means army, service, or organized company.

Nethaneel (Netan'el, נֶתַנְאֵל, meaning "God has given") was the leader of Issachar's tribe, first mentioned in the census (Numbers 1:8). His father Zuar (Tzu'ar, צוּאֵר, meaning "small" or "insignificant") provides genealogical identification. These detailed records demonstrate God's care for order, organization, and individual identity even in a nation of millions.

Issachar's position in the march was part of the larger tribal arrangement around the tabernacle (Numbers 2). Each tribe had its place, leader, and function—a picture of the church where every member has God-given role and calling (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The meticulous record-keeping shows God values both community and individuality. No person is anonymous before Him; He knows each by name (Exodus 33:17, John 10:3). This census establishes Israel's identity as God's covenant people, organized and ready to inherit the Promised Land.

Historical Context

This passage comes from the early wilderness period, shortly after Israel's departure from Mount Sinai (approximately 1445 BC). Numbers 10 describes the organized march from Sinai toward Canaan, with each tribe assigned specific positions and leaders. The census in Numbers 1 counted 603,550 fighting men, suggesting a total population of over 2 million.

Issachar was Jacob's ninth son, born to Leah (Genesis 30:18). The tribe's name means "there is a reward" or "wages." In Jacob's blessing, Issachar is described as "a strong donkey" who "bowed his shoulder to bear burdens" (Genesis 49:14-15)—suggesting strength and willingness to work. Later, Issachar's men were noted for understanding the times and knowing what Israel should do (1 Chronicles 12:32).

The tribal organization reflected both military preparedness and worship centrality—the tabernacle was at the center, with tribes arranged around it in specific order. Archaeological evidence from ancient Near Eastern cultures shows similar military census-taking and tribal organization, but Israel's theocratic structure was unique—they marched as an army with God as their commander, the ark of the covenant leading them (Numbers 10:33-36). This organizational detail demonstrates that God cares about order and structure in His people's common life.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does God's detailed attention to organization teach about His character and care for His people?
2. How does recognizing your God-given position and role in the church body affect your service?

3. What can we learn from Nethaneel's faithful leadership in what seems like an administrative detail?
4. How does the image of God's people as an organized army inform Christian spiritual warfare?
5. In what ways do you need to embrace your particular calling rather than coveting another's role?

Interlinear Text

וְעַל	אֶצֶב	מִטֵּה	בְּנֵי	יִשָּׁשכָר	נִתְנָאֵל
H5921	And over the host	of the tribe	of the children	of Issachar	was Nethaneel
	H6635	H4294	H1121	H3485	H5417
בְּנֵי	צוּעָר:				
of the children	of Zuar				
H1121	H6686				

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