

NOTE to Parents; At the end of this PDF are 2 sketches that I made when I taught this subject. They show how the camp is arranged and the order of march. I realize that this isn't of vital importance for the children to know, however it's good to know as much about the Bible as we can, isn't it? Also, I thought this would be interesting.

Manna, the Camp, and Moving -- A Let's Pretend Visit

(Numbers 4:5-33; 10:12-28)

**By
Joelee Chamberlain**

Another time you and I pretended that we visited the great, big camp of the children of Israel out in the wilderness, didn't we? The children of Israel had really had a camp, but, of course, we hadn't really gone back in time! We were just pretending, weren't we?!

Yes, we had pretended that we could go back in time about 3,500 years, and we had pretended that we looked down from a hill and saw all of the thousands of tents there and saw the Tabernacle of the Lord in the middle of the camp with the pillar of cloud over it. (Remember, that after the Lord had Moses lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, the Lord led them Himself with this pillar of cloud in the daytime and the pillar of fire in the night time. He was leading them through the wilderness to the promised land of Canaan, wasn't He?) And then we had pretended that we went down into the camp and saw the Tabernacle, didn't we? And we had pretended that we talked with men who told us about the Tabernacle.

That was so much fun pretending together that other time, wasn't it?! I like pretending, don't you?! So why don't we pretend together again today?

Okay, then, let's pretend that again we go back in time to over 3,500 years ago, to the same time as the other time we were pretending together. We'll pretend we're out in the wilderness again and up on a hill, and again we are looking down on the camp of the children of Israel. They are no longer slaves in Egypt, are they? No, they are on their way to the promised land of Canaan. But this time let's pretend that we're talking together about the camp itself.

Let's pretend it is very early in the morning. As we're pretending, we notice that there is a lot of something that is white down there on the desert ground. We also notice that a lot of people are outside picking up something off the ground.

You say to me, "I wonder what they are doing?"

I say, "I don't know."

As we're pretending, we watch them a while. Why, they seem to be picking up the something that is white and putting it in baskets! And then they're going back with it to their tents. How strange!

But oh, the tents! There are thousands and thousands of them!

I say to you, "Oh, look at all of the tents!"

You say, "And the tents seem to be in some sort of order, don't they?"

I say, "Yes, they do. Look, they are camped around the Tabernacle area but a ways away from it."

Just then we see a man walking up the hill toward us. He waves and calls out to us, "Hello, there! I saw you standing up here on the hill and thought maybe you needed some help."

By now the man is up with us, so we say, "We aren't in any sort of trouble; but thank you for asking. However, we do have a lot of questions. Would you mind if we ask you our questions?"

He smiles at us and then says, "Why, I would be happy to answer your questions if I know the answers. What are your questions?"

We say, "Oh, thank you, sir. First, though, what is everyone picking up? We don't see anything to pick up."

The man laughs and says, "Why that is our breakfast! Also our other meals for the day."

We are surprised and say, "But what is it? We didn't see any food!"

He laughs again and says, "Why, that's just what it is -- it's `what is it`!"

We gulp and say, "Huh????"

The man says, "Yes, `what is it`! You see, that's exactly what we said when we first saw it! We all asked each other, `What is it? What is it?` So after we found out what it was, we simply called it `What is it' which in our Hebrew language is the word `manna'."

Then we laugh, too, and say, "Oh, we understand now! We've heard of manna before!"

He laughs with us and then says, "Yes, manna is a food that the Lord gives us every morning. You see, there are so many of us that we ran out of food out here in the wilderness. So the Lord makes a miracle for us every morning. Each morning we go out and pick up the little pieces of `what is it', of manna. Then we can grind it up and bake it like bread or we can boil it. It tastes sweet and fresh."

He stops a minute and licks his lips thinking about how it tastes, then he seems to remember something. So he says, "But we just pick up enough to last us for the day."

We ask, "Why don't you pick up enough to last for several days?"

He says, "Oh, if we pick up more than we need for just that one day, why, the next morning the leftovers are all rotten, and they stink and have worms in them."

We say, "Yuck!"

He laughs and says, "Yes!" Then he says, "But we don't need to worry about not having enough for each day; we just need to trust what the Lord promised, that He will give us more the next morning. And He does. The Lord always keeps His promises!"

We say, "Oh, manna must have been the white looking stuff that we saw on the ground."

He says, "Yes, it was."

Then we look again and are puzzled. We say, "But we don't see any of that white manna there now."

The man says, "Well, you got here very early before the sun was up very high. You see, when the sun gets hot, the manna that's left on the ground all melts. So we don't sleep in late or we won't have food that day, will we?!"

He laughs, and we laugh with him. Then he says, "Yes, the manna melts when the sun gets hot, but we know that there will be more the next morning. That is, each morning except the seventh day of the week, of course."

We are surprised and ask him, "Why isn't there manna on the seventh day of the week? Do you have to go hungry that day?"

He smiles at us and says, "Oh, no, we don't go hungry! You see, the Lord has told us that we are to rest on the seventh day of the week, the day that you call Saturday. We call that seventh day the Sabbath. 'Sabbath' just means 'rest' or 'stop', to stop working. That is a special day for us to get all rested up from working all week. Isn't that nice?"

We nod and then ask him, "But don't you have anything to eat that day?"

He says, "Oh, yes. I said that manna is a miracle, didn't I? But it's not just one miracle; it has other miracles with it. You see, for the first 5 days of the week we just gather enough manna for that one day, otherwise, as I said, it is rotten and wormy by the next morning. But on the sixth day of the week (what you call Friday) the Lord sends extra manna, and we gather enough manna to last us for two days. Then the next morning, on Saturday, there is no new manna, but the extra manna that we'd gathered on Friday isn't spoiled. It is still good. You can see what a miracle our manna is, can't you?"

We say, "Oh, yes!"

We think about the miracle of manna a minute and then we say, "Thank you for telling us

about the manna, but we have some more questions. Do you have time to talk with us some more?"

He nods his head, so we say to him, "Well, we were just looking at your camp there. Can you tell us if there is a certain order to the way you are all camped?"

He says, "Yes, there is. You see, the Lord told Moses just how we were to set up our camp. The Lord said that the families of the 12 tribes of Israel were to camp around the Tabernacle. So there are 3 tribes camped on each of the 4 sides of the Tabernacle area."

We ask him, "Where did these 12 tribes come from?"

He says, "Well, you remember, don't you, that our great-great-grandfather Jacob had 12 sons?"

We say, "Yes, we remember that." Then suddenly we say, "Oh, you mean that the 12 tribes are descended from Jacob's 12 sons, one tribe from each son?"

The man seems pleased and smiles at us. "Yes," he says, "that's right! What good thinking!"

We say, "But why are you all called the children of Israel? Who was Israel?"

He says, "Oh, don't you remember? The Lord gave Jacob another name. The Lord said that Jacob would also be called Israel. So we are called the children or descendants of Israel."

We say, "Oh, yes, now we remember. We'd forgotten that."

The man asks us, "Do you remember any of the names of Jacob's 12 sons?"

We think a minute, then you say, "Well, Joseph was one of them. And Judah was one, too."

I say, "Yes, and there were Levi and Benjamin as well."

And you say, "Oh, and Reuben was the oldest, wasn't he?"

He says, "Yes, he was. Very good!"

Then he says, "But you asked if there were any special order to the way we are camped around the Tabernacle. Well, not only did the Lord say that 3 tribes were to camp on each side of the Tabernacle, but He also said which tribes were to camp on which side. And the Lord also said that each side would have sort of a leader tribe. He said that on the east side of the Tabernacle, at the front of it, the tribe of Judah was to be the leader, and the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun are to be with Judah. On the south side of the Tabernacle, the tribe of Reuben was to be the leader, and the tribes of Simeon and Gad are to be with Reuben. On the west side of the Tabernacle, at the back of it, the tribe of Ephraim was to be the leader and the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin are to be with Ephraim. And then on the north side of the Tabernacle the tribe of Dan was to be the leader and the tribes of

Asher and Naphtali are to be with Dan. That way each tribe knows exactly where it is to camp and put up their tents."

But then we see that there are also some tents quite near the Tabernacle area. So we ask the man, "But there are more tents that are closer to the Tabernacle fence. Whose are those tents?"

He says, "Oh, those are the tents of the tribe of Levi."

We ask, "But why are they camped so near the Tabernacle?"

He says to us, "You remember that Levi was one of Jacob's sons, don't you?"

We nod.

He says, "Well, Levi himself had 3 sons. Their names were Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Their families are called Le-vites. In fact, Moses and his brother Aaron are grandsons of Kohath and great-grandsons of Levi."

He says, "Well, the Lord said that Aaron was to be the high priest and his sons are to be the regular priests. And the Lord also said that the rest of the tribe of Levi is to take care of the Tabernacle. So, that is why they are camped around the Tabernacle."

We look down at the camp, we can see that the tribe of Levi is camped closer to the Tabernacle area itself. There are the families of 1 of Levi's sons camped on one long side of the Tabernacle yard, the families of another of Levi's sons camped on the back side of the Tabernacle yard, and the families of yet another of Levi's sons camped on the other long side of the Tabernacle yard.

We stand there and look at the camp, and then we ask the man, "But if Levi only had 3 sons, whose families are those who are camped on the fourth side of the Tabernacle yard, the eastern side that has the gate? Do you know?"

He says, "Yes. Those are the families of Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron are also descended from one of the 3 sons of Levi, but, remember, they are the leaders of the whole camp, so they have a little camp by themselves there at the gate of the Tabernacle yard."

We think about that a minute and then say, "Oh, and since Aaron is the high priest and his sons are the priests, that means that the priests are all camped near the gate of the Tabernacle, doesn't it?"

"Yes," he says.

We think about this another minute, and then we ask him, "But doesn't that make 13 tribes? How can there be 3 tribes on each of the 4 sides of the Tabernacle plus the tribe of Levi and yet be only 12 tribes?"

He smiles at us and says, "You're really doing a lot of thinking, aren't you?! But, remember, Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh, who are Joseph's two sons. So actually Joseph has 2 tribes, the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Manasseh.. And, yes, that makes 13 tribes. But since Levi's tribe takes care of the Tabernacle, it isn't always counted, leaving only 12 tribes."

We say, "Oh, I see."

He stops a minute and then says, "In fact, when we finally do get to the land of Canaan, the Lord said that each of the tribes of Israel except the tribe of Levi will have (will inherit you might say) a certain big part of the land of Canaan. But Levi won't have any one, certain, big part of the land of Canaan. Instead, the Lord gave the tribe of Levi a special, great honor. He said that rather than just land, that Levi would inherit the Lord. That means that only the ones descended from Levi through Aaron will be God's priests, and that the other Levites will also serve the Lord by taking care of the Tabernacle. What an honor! So instead of having one big part of the land, the tribe of Levi will have cities of their own -- but these cities will be in parts of all of the other tribe's. That way they can help all of the tribes as they worship the Lord."

"But," he says, "there are other times when Levi is counted as one of the tribes. And then the 2 tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (named after Joseph's 2 sons) can be counted as just 1 tribe, the tribe of Joseph. So this still makes 12 tribes."

We nod our heads to show that we understand.

Then he says, "But we were talking about the way we are camped. Well, the way our tribes are camped also makes it very easy for us when we move from one place to another."

We ask, "But how do you know when it's time to move?"

He says, "Oh, that's easy! You see, when the pillar of cloud rises up from off the top of the Tabernacle, then we know it is time to move our camp. And we all know what we are to do then."

We say, "Oh, please tell us about that if you have the time!"

The man says, "Yes, I have the time and am happy to tell you about it."

So, as we're pretending, we sit down on some big rocks and get ready to listen. This is exciting, isn't it?

The man sits down on a big rock, too, clears his throat, and then he says, "Well, when the pillar of cloud goes up and it's time to move, then of course all of the tribes take down their own tents and get ready. But the tribe of Levi has special things that they do as well. Remember, they have been given the honor of taking care of the Tabernacle. But only the priests (Aaron and his sons) may take care of the furniture of the Tabernacle. So when we are going to move, first Aaron and the other priests go inside of the Tabernacle and take down the beautiful veil, the curtain that divides the

Tabernacle into 2 rooms. Then they cover the golden ark of the covenant and its lid, the Mercy Seat, with this veil. Next they put another covering over the veil, and finally they put a big blue cloth over that. The carrying poles are already in the rings of the ark of the covenant."

We nod to show that we understand what he's saying. So he goes on talking. "Then Aaron and the priests cover the rest of the Tabernacle furniture, that is, the golden table of shewbread, the pure gold lampstand, and the golden altar of incense. Yes, they cover the table of shewbread with its bowls and other things and put the carrying poles into the rings on the table. They do the same with the golden altar of incense. And they cover the golden lampstand and put it on a kind of carrying bar. Remember, the beautiful lampstand doesn't have rings to slide poles into."

We nod and say, "Yes, we remember that." Then we also remember that some translations of the Bible call the lampstand a candlestick.

The man goes on talking. He says, "Then the priests take all of the things that they use to take care of things inside the Tabernacle, and they cover them and put them on another carrying bar. Oh, and they cover the big bronze altar that is outside, too, and put its carrying poles into its rings."

He stops a minute. Then we remember that some translations of the Bible say the big outside altar is brass, but brass and bronze are sort of the same metal.

The man goes on talking, "When Aaron and his sons are all finished covering everything, then certain Levites, the ones descended from Levi's son Kohath (Moses and Aaron's grandfather) may go into the Tabernacle, and Aaron tells them which things they are to carry. Now, the Lord had warned the Levites not to touch the furniture itself, but only to touch the carrying poles, so they are very careful. Only the priests may touch the furniture, especially the ark of the covenant. So when we're ready to move, these Levites will pick up the Tabernacle furniture by their carrying poles or carrying bars and carry them on their shoulders. Remember, the Tabernacle furniture is holy, that is, it's very special to the Lord. Do you understand what I'm telling you so far?"

We nod our heads. "Yes," we say, "we understand. And this is so interesting!"

He says, "Good! After that the other Levites take apart and take down the whole Tabernacle and its fence."

Then he says, "The Levites who are descended from Gershon use carts to carry all of the heavy coverings of the Tabernacle itself and the fence curtains. And the descendants of Levi's son Merari also have the honor of taking care of moving things from the Tabernacle. You see, they also have carts, and their carts carry the boards that make up the Tabernacle walls and all of the posts and things for the Tabernacle and fence. So finally then we are ready to move our camp."

We ask, "After everything is ready, what do you do then?"

He says, "Well, the Lord with the pillar of cloud begins moving, leading us to where we are to go next. Then we move out in turns, according to the way the tribes are camped. First the eastern

tribes, the ones at the front of the Tabernacle, start out. That would be Judah with the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun after him. Next come the Levite families of Gershon and Merari with their carts that are carrying the the walls and coverings and posts, everything for the tent part of the Tabernacle, and its fence."

We interrupt him and ask, "Are the Levites pulling the carts themselves?"

He says, "Oh, no. They have strong oxen that pull the carts. Those Levites just guide the oxen."

We are glad to hear that, as those carts would really be heavy, wouldn't they?!

Then the man goes on talking, "Well, next in line after the carts come the tribes that were camped on the south side of the Tabernacle, one of the long sides. That would be Reubin with the tribes of Simeon and Gad after him. Next comes the family of Levi's other son Kohath who are carrying the furniture for the Tabernacle on their shoulders. Of course, Moses and Aaron and the priests would be with them. Next come the western tribes that were camped at the back of the Tabernacle, the tribe of Ephraim with the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin after him. And last of all come the tribes that were camped on the other long side of the Tabernacle, the north side of it, that is, the tribe of Dan with the tribes of Asher and Naphtali after him. You can see that it is all very orderly."

We say, "Yes! And that must make quite a procession!!"

He says, "It does! Remember, there are 2 or 3 million of us! And we have our flocks and herds of animals with us as well! But this is all done in the orderly way that the Lord told us. And, notice, the way we are lined up, you can see that the Tabernacle and its furniture are well guarded, can't you?"

We nod and then ask him, "But how do you know where to go?"

He says, "Oh, that part is easy! After all, the Lord is leading us in the pillar of cloud! Of course, we don't move fast, because of the animals and the people who are walking. And also because of the Levites who are carrying the furniture of the Tabernacle on their shoulders are walking, too."

We ask, "What do you do when the pillar of cloud stops?"

He says, "Why, then we know that this is where we'll set up our next camp. Now, of course the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun get there first, cause those tribes are at the front. They start setting up their tents and can also stand guard as the rest of us come on. Next, then, the Levite families of Gershon and Merari get there with the carts carrying the walls of the Tabernacle and its coverings and the fence posts and its curtains, And those Levites start setting them up, getting everything ready for the furniture."

We nod to show that we understand.

He goes on talking, "Well, the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad get there next. They set up their camp and can also stand guard as the Levites come along next carrying the furniture for the Tabernacle. Well, the Tabernacle is already all set up by then, isn't it?"

We nod our heads, and he says, "Well, then the Levite family of Kohath gets there with the furniture and just carry it inside the gateway of the fence, right into the Tabernacle yard. They leave the bronze altar in the yard, and carry the rest of the furniture into the Tabernacle/tent itself. Then the Levites go out, and Aaron and his sons (the priests) began unwrapping and setting up the ark of the covenant in the inner room (the Holy of Holies) and hanging up the veil to make the two rooms. Then they unwrap and set up the lampstand, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense in the outer room (the Holy Place). Do you understand?"

Again we nod our heads.

So the man goes on talking. "And while the priests are doing this, all of the rest of the tribes are getting there (Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin and then Dan, Asher, and Naphtali), and soon our whole camp is set up. You see, since the Lord gave the directions for all of this, it all goes very smoothly!"

We say, "Yes, we can see that. How interesting!"

As we are looking down on the camp, suddenly the man stands up and says, "Oh, look! The pillar of cloud is going up!"

We stand up, too, and say, "Oh, wow!"

He then says, "I'd better get back and help my family take down our camp! Goodbye!! I've enjoyed talking with you!"

As he leaves, we call out, "Thank you very much!! It has been fun. Have a good trip!"

We watch as the man hurries down the hill. We stand there and watch for quite a while as the people are all hurrying around taking down their tents and getting ready. And we see the priests hurrying into the Tabernacle to cover the furniture. Then we see the Levites carrying the covered furniture out on their shoulders and other Levites taking the big, heavy coverings off the Tabernacle walls and putting them in carts. We watch as the long poles in the gold covered wall boards are taken out of their rings and as they take the gold covered wall boards down and put them and their silver bases in carts. We watch as they take the cloth fence down and its bronze posts down and put them in carts along with their bronze bases.

Now the whole camp seems ready, so we continue standing there and watching as the big pillar of cloud begins slowly moving, and the tribe of Judah starts marching off following it, with Issacher and Zebulun behind them. Thousands and thousands of people! Then we watch while the Levite families of Gershon and Merari follow them with their carts in which are the taken apart

pieces of the Tabernacle/tent and fence.

We keep watching as the tribe of Reuben follows after the carts with the tribes of Simeon and Gad. Then, oh my! There goes the Levite family of Kohath carrying the wrapped up furniture of the Tabernacle on their shoulders!! We know which one is the ark of the covenant, because it's the only one with the blue outer covering! How exciting!!

Next we watch the tribe of Ephraim with Manasseh and Benjamin march off, and then last we watch the tribe of Dan with Asher and Naphtali follow them. We stand there and watch as the huge cloud pillar of the Lord leads these millions of people with their animals across the wilderness. They stretch out for miles! But we strain our eyes to follow the blue covering of the ark of the covenant.

You say to me, "Why are we so very interested in the ark of the covenant? Why is it so special and important? I feel it is, but I don't remember why. Why, it even has its own room to itself in the Tabernacle!"

I say to you, "Yes, I know what you mean and how you are feeling. But, remember, the Bible tells us that the Tabernacle itself is sort of a little picture of heaven. The Holy of Holies is sort of like God's throne room in heaven. The Lord actually spoke to Moses from above the ark of the covenant. And the ark is like God's footstool. The Tabernacle was like a temple or church for the children of Israel, and there were sacrifices there every day. We know now from the Bible that all of those sacrifices were like pictures that were pointing to the one enormous, final sacrifice."

You say, "What do you mean, the one enormous, final sacrifice?"

I say, "Why, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our sins. You remember, don't you, that over a thousand years after the Tabernacle was in the wilderness, that God the Father Who loves us so much, had Jesus, the Son of God, come to earth? And Jesus died on the cross for us."

You say, "Yes, I remember. And Jesus didn't have to die, did He, because He'd never done anything wrong; He never sinned."

I say to you, "That's right. But Jesus died for us because He loves us so very much, and we've all done things we shouldn't; we've all sinned, so we shouldn't be able to go to heaven and be with God someday."

You say to me excitedly, "I know. But Jesus didn't stay dead, did He!? He was alive 3 days later and stayed alive! And He's still alive in heaven! And if we believe this and trust in Jesus to forgive our sins, He will! Oh, and then someday we can be with God in heaven and see His heavenly throne room, can't we?!"

I smile happily, "Yes!!"

Then you say to me, "But look, I can hardly see the children of Israel anymore. And I can barely see the pillar of cloud."

I say, "Let's watch as long as we can."

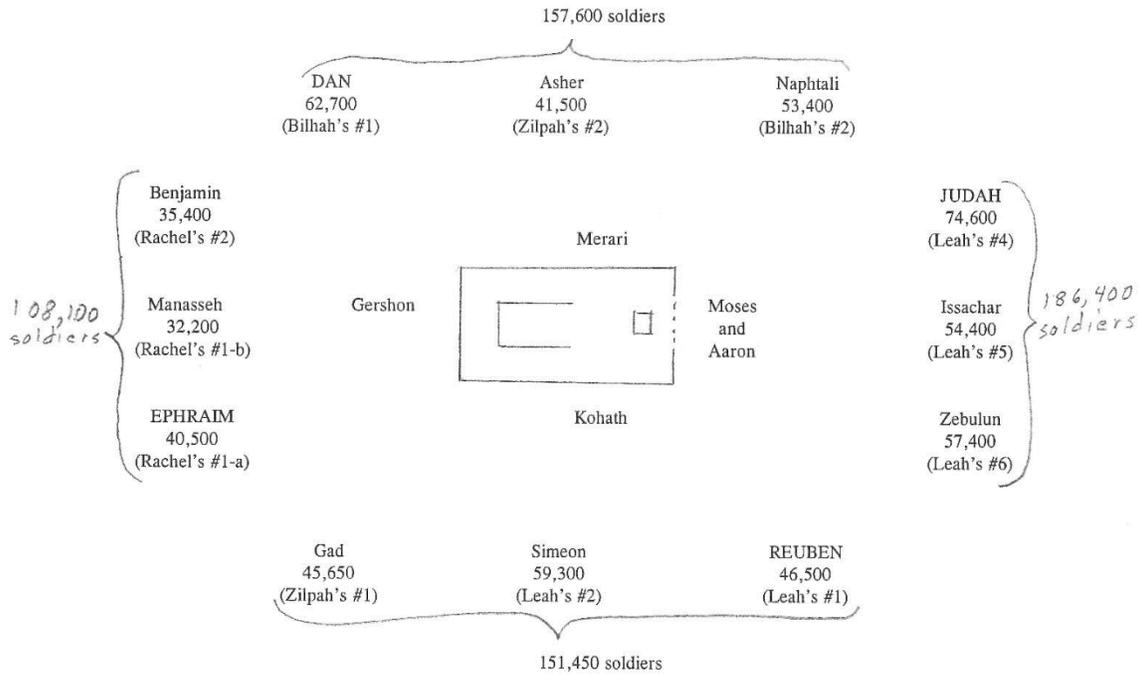
You say, "Yes, let's."

We watch, The last of the people are almost out of sight. Finally they are gone. It was almost as if we were holding our breath as we had watched. You and I look at each other and take a deep breath. What a wonderful experience!

But wait a minute! We were only pretending to be back then and seeing these things, weren't we?! Wow!! We were pretending about real things, but, of course, we hadn't really been there at all, had we?! But sometimes pretending can almost seem real, can't it!?

Thank you for pretending with me. I learned so much; did you? -- And it was fun!

HOW THE JEWISH CAMP WAS SET UP



ORDER OF MARCH

