

Message Two

The Growth and Maturity Required for the Formation of the Army to Protect God's Testimony and Fight for His Move on Earth

Scripture Reading: Num. 1:2-3, 19-20; 2:1-2, 32, 34; Phil. 3:12-15; Eph. 6:10-12

- I. The emphasis of Numbers is how the Israelites, who had been redeemed, received revelation, and been trained by God, were formed into an army to protect God's testimony and fight for His move on earth—1:2-3, 19-20:**
 - A. Since the earth created by God was ruined by Satan, God needs to gain a group of people to be formed into an army for His move on earth—v. 3.
 - B. Numbers shows how God formed His redeemed people into an army to surround and protect His testimony—2:1-2, 32, 34:
 1. In Numbers, particularly in the first four chapters, the Israelites were formed into an army according to God's arrangement.
 2. In order for the children of Israel to be formed into an army, they needed to be numbered; only after being numbered could the Israelites be formed into an army—1:2-3, 19-20.
- II. In order "to go forth for military service," an Israelite male needed to be at least twenty years old; this is related to growth and maturity—v. 3:**
 - A. There were approximately two million Israelites, but only 603,550 were twenty years old and upward and were able to go forth for military service—vv. 45-46.
 - B. Even though there are a great many believers on earth, only a small number among them are mature in life to the extent that they are able to fight for God's testimony—Eph. 4:12, 15-16; 6:10-12.
 - C. Numbers mentions the age for those enlisting in the army, which was twenty years old and upward, yet this book does not mention the age for retirement:
 1. God's army was strong, just as Caleb was able to fight and was as strong before God in his eighties as he was in his forties—Josh. 14:6, 10-11.
 2. This signifies that we must have both life and maturity in life in order to be numbered by God.
 - D. According to Numbers, neither children nor women were numbered:
 1. Children signify immaturity, and women signify weakness.
 2. That only males who were twenty years old and upward were able to engage in warfare signifies that among the believers, only those who are mature in life and strong are able to fight in spiritual warfare.
 - E. Those who were numbered needed to be confirmed by Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the twelve tribes—1:4, 16-18:
 1. Moses signifies Christ as the Head of the Body who executes His authority, Aaron signifies Christ as the High Priest who exercises His priesthood, and the leaders of the twelve tribes signify the elders and leading ones in the church—Col. 1:18; Heb. 8:1; Acts 14:23:
 - a. This indicates that the numbering of God's people is based on life and maturity in life and is confirmed by spiritual authority.
 - b. Life, maturity, and the confirmation of spiritual authority are required for the formation of God's army.
 2. In order to be numbered, the children of Israel were required to be in the fellowship of the life of their fathers' households and had to grow in life unto maturity, which is signified by the age of twenty—Num. 1:1-16.

III. In the Lord's recovery today, there is an urgent need for the growth and maturity required for the formation of God's army; we need to grow in life unto maturity—Exo. 30:14; Num. 1:2-3, 18; Eph. 4:12-16:

- A. Spiritually, males who are twenty years old and over signify those among God's people who, regardless of their natural status, are strong in spirit and mature in the divine life; only these are qualified to be formed into an army to fight for God's interest and move on earth—Exo. 30:14; Num. 1:3.
- B. The growth of life is the increase of the element of God (Col. 2:19), the increase of the stature of Christ (Eph. 3:17a; 4:13), the expanding of the ground of the Holy Spirit (5:18), the decrease of the human element, the breaking of the natural life, and the subduing of every part of our soul (2 Tim. 1:7).
- C. To be transformed is to be metabolically changed in our natural life, whereas to be matured is to be filled with the divine life that changes us; the last stage of transformation is maturity, the fullness of life—Heb. 6:1.
- D. In the New Testament the word *mature* refers to the believers' being full-grown and perfected in the life of God—Matt. 5:48; John 3:3, 5-6, 15:
 - 1. As believers, we need to go on, to be brought on, to maturity by forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, pursuing toward the fullest enjoyment and gaining of Christ for the uttermost enjoyment of Christ in the millennial kingdom—Phil. 3:12-15.
 - 2. The prerequisite for maturity in the spiritual life is to grow continually in the divine life—Eph. 4:15.
 - 3. The ultimate issue of the believers' growth and maturity in the life of Christ is a full-grown man—the church as the Body of Christ growing into a mature man—vv. 13, 16.
- E. To be mature is to have Christ fully formed in us; it also means that we have been fully transformed into His image—Gal. 4:19; 2 Cor. 3:18:
 - 1. Since the time of our regeneration, the Lord has been working in us so that we may have His image—v. 18; Rom. 8:29.
 - 2. When the Lord has fully worked His image into us and is fully expressed through us, we will be mature in life—v. 29; 2 Cor. 3:18.
- F. Chapter 3 of Song of Songs shows us the maturity of the seeking one, and chapter 4 explains that maturity is reached by the subduing of the will:
 - 1. The secret of the maturity of the seeking one is that her will has been completely subdued and resurrected—3:6-9; 4:1b, 4.
 - 2. The neck signifies the human will under God; the Lord considers the submission of our will a most beautiful thing—v. 4.
 - 3. First, our will must be subdued; then it will be strong in resurrection and be like the tower of David, the armory for the spiritual warfare—Eph. 6:10.
 - 4. If we have a submissive will, our will becomes like the tower of David that holds all kinds of weapons for warfare—2 Cor. 10:3-5.

IV. In order for the children of God to reach the spiritual age of twenty, they need to pass through the first three stages of the experience of life and enter into the fourth stage:

- A. The first stage of the experience of life is being in Christ, the second stage is abiding in Christ, and the third stage is Christ living in us, which is also the stage of the cross—Gal. 2:20; 3:1; 5:24; Matt. 16:24.
- B. In the third stage the seeking believers deal with the flesh, the self, and the natural constitution with the natural strength and ability:

1. The flesh denotes the totality of the fallen old man, our entire fallen being—Gen. 6:3; Rom. 7:18a; Gal. 2:16:
 - a. The flesh is the living out and the expression of the old man—Rom. 6:6.
 - b. The flesh cannot be changed or improved; thus, we need to be mindful of the fact that the flesh is always with us—13:14; Gal. 5:16.
 - c. The flesh is the camp of God's enemy and the largest base for his work—vv. 19-21:
 - (1) The flesh is the first among our enemies, taking the lead over sin, the world, and Satan to fight against us—Rom. 8:3.
 - (2) God hates the flesh in the same manner that He hates Satan, and He wants to destroy the flesh in the same manner that He wants to destroy Satan—Exo. 17:16; Deut. 25:17-19; 1 Sam. 15:2-3.
2. The self is the soul-life with the emphasis on human thoughts and opinions—Matt. 16:23-25:
 - a. In Matthew 16:23-25 three terms are related to one another: *mind*, *himself*, and *soul-life*:
 - (1) Our mind is the expression of our self, and our self is the embodiment of our soul-life—vv. 23-25.
 - (2) Our soul-life is embodied in and lived out by our self, and our self is expressed through our mind, idea, thought, concept, and opinion—vv. 22-23.
 - b. The self is the embodiment of Satan; the self is the essence of Satan in the soul, making the soul independent from God to express its self-opinion and self-will—v. 23; Gen. 3:1-6; 2 Cor. 11:3.
 - c. The self is the soul declaring its independence from God—Matt. 16:23; Luke 14:26; Job 42:5-6.
3. The natural constitution is the aggregate of our physical and mental abilities—1 Cor. 2:14-15; Phil. 3:3, 10-11:
 - a. The natural strength and ability do not have the divine element.
 - b. The natural strength and ability act on their own, not according to God's will.
 - c. When we work with our natural ability, we seek our own glory and satisfy our own desire.
 - d. When our natural strength and ability are dealt with by the cross, they become useful in resurrection—v. 11.
- C. The fourth stage of our spiritual experience and spiritual life is the highest stage—Christ's full growth in us—the stage of spiritual warfare, where Christ is fully grown and matured in us—Eph. 4:13-16; 6:10-18:
 1. At the end of the third stage, we express God with His image, and in the fourth stage, we represent Him with His authority—Gen. 1:26.
 2. The experience of life in the fourth stage includes knowing the Body, knowing ascension, reigning with Christ, engaging in spiritual warfare, and being full of the stature of Christ—1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 6:10-12.
 3. In order to know the Body and live in the Body, we must first deal with the flesh, the self, and the natural constitution—Gal. 5:24; Matt. 16:24:
 - a. If we still live according to the flesh, in ourselves, and serve the Lord in our natural ability, there is no way for us to know the Body—1 Cor. 12:12.
 - b. Only when our flesh has been dealt with, the self-opinion has been broken, and the natural life has been smashed will the divine life within us

enable us to know the Body and realize that we are simply members of the Body and that the life within us cannot be independent.

4. If we want to fight the spiritual warfare and deal with God's enemy, we must first deal with our flesh, self, and soul-life—2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-12:
 - a. Engaging in spiritual warfare to deal with Satan and recover the earth for God requires that we be wholly and absolutely for God and obey Him completely—Gen. 1:26-28:
 - (1) We cannot preserve ourselves or leave one bit for ourselves.
 - (2) When we are dealing with Satan, self must be utterly abandoned.
 - b. The church must engage in spiritual warfare, fighting to bring in the kingdom of God—Matt. 12:28; Eph. 6:10-18; Rev. 12:10a; 11:15.

V. The prayer at the incense altar issued in the numbering of the children of Israel for the formation of an army to fight for God's interest on the earth—Exo. 30:11-16; Num. 1:45-46:

- A. As a result of the prayer at the incense altar, the Lord conducts a “military census” of the saints in the churches; those who are numbered are qualified to go to war for God's move on the earth—2:32; 4:23; 2 Tim. 2:3.
- B. The intercession offered at the incense altar is for the growth and maturity of the believers so that an army can be formed—Eph. 4:13; 6:10-12:
 1. The more we pray at the incense altar, the more we will realize that the need for maturity is desperate, and the greater will be the urgency to pray for the growth in life unto maturity—1 Cor. 2:6; 3:1-2; 14:20; 16:13; Heb. 5:14—6:1; Eph. 3:16.
 2. Only when such an army is formed will God be able to move on earth for His purpose; apart from an army formed of mature ones, there is no way for God to move—4:13; 6:10-12.