



Numbers - Chapter Twenty Six

V Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Six

The later chapters of Numbers are all concerned with Israel's future life in Canaan. Balaam has predicted a secure and prosperous future there. This census deals with establishing the relative size of the tribes so that they may each be given an appropriately sized allocation.

The first census in Chapter 1 was primarily concerned with establishing the number of fighting men, but this issue is mentioned only once in this second census. The issue of territory probably also explains why the second census is so interested in the clans that make up each tribe, which are hardly mentioned in Chapter 1.

The total number of Israelites has changed very little between the censuses: 603,550 in the first and 601,730 in the second. Even though the total may be similar, vv.64-65 stress that the people being counted are quite different: only Joshua and Caleb figure in both totals. The tribal totals vary somewhat more than the overall total, but the most striking change is the fall in Simeon's total from 59,300 to 22,200 and the increase in Manasseh's from 32,200 to 52,700. The fall in Simeon's numbers could be partly due to the plague caused by Zimri, the Simeonite, but there is no obvious explanation for the increase in Manasseh.

V.c Numbers 26:1-65 - A Census of the New Generation

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ After the plague the Lord said to Moses and to Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, ² 'Take a census of the whole congregation of the Israelites,

from twenty years old and upwards, by their ancestral houses, everyone in Israel able to go to war.’³ Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho, saying,^{4a} ‘Take a census of the people, from twenty years old and upwards’, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Numbers 26:1-4a

Eleazar son of Aaron the priest. Eleazar has now taken over from Aaron, his father, as high priest.

Take a census of the whole congregation of the Israelites. Some thirty eight years earlier, at the beginning of the Book of Numbers, while Israel still camped at Mount Sinai, God commanded them to take a census. The first census was primarily for military organisation. If they were to enter into and take possession of the Promised Land, they had to know how many troops they had, and how they should best be organised.

Everyone in Israel able to go to war. The purpose of the second census was also made clear. They were to count those able to fight on behalf of Israel. This accounting, thirty eight years later, was again for military organisation. Thirty eight years before Israel was organised enough; they just did not have enough faith to take the Promised Land. Organisation is good, and the work of God can suffer from a lack of it; but the best organisation can never replace bold trust in God.

^{4b} The Israelites, who came out of the land of Egypt, were:

⁵ Reuben, the firstborn of Israel. The descendants of Reuben: of Hanoch, the clan of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the clan of the Palluites;
⁶ of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the clan of the Carmites.
⁷ These are the clans of the Reubenites; the number of those enrolled was forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty.
⁸ And the descendants of Pallu: Eliab.
⁹ The descendants of Eliab: Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen from the congregation, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they rebelled against the Lord,
¹⁰ and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a warning.
¹¹ Notwithstanding, the sons of Korah did not die.

Numbers 26:4b-11

The descendants of Reuben. In the first census, Reuben counted 46,500 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 43,730, a loss of 2,770 men or six percent.

These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen from the congregation, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah. Notable in the tribe of Reuben were Dathan and Abiram, who were co-leaders with Korah in the rebellion against the Lord and Moses described in Numbers Chapter 16. Perhaps one reason Dathan and Abiram resented Moses' leadership was because they were from the tribe of Israel's firstborn son Reuben; yet Moses, descended from Levi, a younger son, was the leader of the nation, which was against cultural tradition.

And they became a warning. God's judgement of Dathan, Abiram, Korah and their followers in Numbers Chapter 16 surely was a warning sign, both to the generation in the wilderness and beyond.

The sons of Korah did not die clarifies a possible misreading of Numbers 16:32. Descendants of Korah were later allocated the important role as gatekeepers in Solomon's temple (1 Chronicles Chapter 26), and were credited with writing Psalms 42, 44-49 and 84-85. In one of them they clearly stated their position: *<<For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness>>* (Psalm 84:10). It was a position of honour: *<<We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God>>* (Ezra 7:24).

¹² The descendants of Simeon by their clans: of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; ¹³ of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the clan of the Shaulites. ¹⁴ These are the clans of the Simeonites, twenty-two thousand two hundred.

Numbers 26:12-14

The descendants of Simeon. In the first census, the tribe of Simeon counted 59,300 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 22,000. This was staggering loss of 37,100 men for this once great tribe, a loss of 63 percent.

¹⁵ The children of Gad by their clans: of Zephon, the clan of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the clan of the Haggites; of Shuni, the clan of the Shunites; ¹⁶ of Ozni, the clan of the Oznites; of Eri, the clan of the Erites; ¹⁷ of Arod, the clan of the Arodites; of Areli, the clan of the

Arelites. ¹⁸ These are the clans of the Gadites: the number of those enrolled was forty thousand five hundred.

Numbers 26:15-18

The children of Gad. In the first census, the tribe of Gad counted 45,650 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they count 40,500. This was a loss of 5,150 fighting men or 11 percent.

¹⁹ The sons of Judah: Er and Onan; Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The descendants of Judah by their clans were: of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. ²¹ The descendants of Perez were: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites. ²² These are the clans of Judah: the number of those enrolled was seventy-six thousand five hundred.

Numbers 26:19-22

The sons of Judah. In the first census, the tribe of Judah counted 74,600 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 76,500. This was a gain of 1,900 or 3 percent.

²³ The descendants of Issachar by their clans: of Tola, the clan of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the clan of the Punites; ²⁴ of Jashub, the clan of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the clan of the Shimronites. ²⁵ These are the clans of Issachar: sixty-four thousand three hundred enrolled.

Numbers 26:23-25

The descendants of Issachar. In the first census, the tribe of Issachar counted 54,400 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 64,300. This was a gain of 9,900 or 18 percent.

²⁶ The descendants of Zebulun by their clans: of Sered, the clan of the Seredites; of Elon, the clan of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the clan of the Jahleelites. ²⁷ These are the clans of the Zebulunites; the number of those enrolled was sixty thousand five hundred.

Numbers 26:26-27

The descendants of Zebulun. In the first census, the tribe of Zebulun counted 57,400 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 60,500. This was a gain of 3,100 or 5 percent.

²⁸ The sons of Joseph by their clans: Manasseh and Ephraim. ²⁹ The descendants of Manasseh: of Machir, the clan of the Machirites; and Machir was the father of Gilead; of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites. ³⁰ These are the descendants of Gilead: of Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites; of Helek, the clan of the Helekites; ³¹ and of Asriel, the clan of the Asrielites; and of Shechem, the clan of the Shechemites; ³² and of Shemida, the clan of the Shemidaites; and of Hephher, the clan of the Hephherites. ³³ Now Zelophehad son of Hephher had no sons, but daughters: and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. ³⁴ These are the clans of Manasseh; the number of those enrolled was fifty-two thousand seven hundred.

Numbers 26:28-34

The descendants of Manasseh. In the first census, the tribe of Manasseh counted 32,200 ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 52,700. This was a remarkable gain of 20,500 or 64 percent.

Verse 28 reverses the order of Ephraim and Manasseh in Numbers 1:32-35. The detail given about Manasseh is striking. It is needed to explain the identity of the daughters of Zelophehad, who are prominent in Chapters 27 and 36. Refer also to the comment made on Numbers 27:1-11.

³⁵ These are the descendants of Ephraim according to their clans: of Shuthelah, the clan of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the clan of the Becherites; of Tahan, the clan of the Tahanites. ³⁶ And these are the descendants of Shuthelah: of Eran, the clan of the Eranites. ³⁷ These are the clans of the Ephraimites: the number of those enrolled was thirty-two thousand five hundred. These are the descendants of Joseph by their clans.

Numbers 26:35-37

These are the descendants of Ephraim. In the first census, the tribe of Ephraim counted 40,500 ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 32,500. This was a loss of 8,000 men or 20 percent.

³⁸ The descendants of Benjamin by their clans: of Bela, the clan of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the clan of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the clan of the Ahiramites; ³⁹ of Shephupham, the clan of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the clan of the Huphamites. ⁴⁰ And the sons of Bela were Ard

and Naaman: of Ard, the clan of the Ardites; of Naaman, the clan of the Naamites. ⁴¹ These are the descendants of Benjamin by their clans; the number of those enrolled was forty-five thousand six hundred.

Numbers 26:38-41

The descendants of Benjamin. In the first census, the tribe of Benjamin counted 35,400 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 45,600. This was a gain of 10,200 men or 29 percent.

⁴² These are the descendants of Dan by their clans: of Shuham, the clan of the Shuhamites. These are the clans of Dan by their clans. ⁴³ All the clans of the Shuhamites: sixty-four thousand four hundred enrolled.

Numbers 26:42-43

These are the descendants of Dan. In the first census, the tribe of Dan counted 62,700 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 64,400. This was a gain of 1,700 men or 3 percent.

⁴⁴ The descendants of Asher by their families: of Imnah, the clan of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the clan of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the clan of the Beriites. ⁴⁵ Of the descendants of Beriah: of Heber, the clan of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the clan of the Malchielites. ⁴⁶ And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah. ⁴⁷ These are the clans of the Asherites: the number of those enrolled was fifty-three thousand four hundred.

Numbers 26:44-47

The descendants of Asher. In the first census, the tribe of Asher counted 41,500 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 53,400 men. This was a gain of 11,900 or 29 percent.

⁴⁸ The descendants of Naphtali by their clans: of Jahzeel, the clan of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the clan of the Gunites; ⁴⁹ of Jezer, the clan of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the clan of the Shillemites. ⁵⁰ These are the Naphtalites by their clans: the number of those enrolled was forty-five thousand four hundred.

Numbers 26:48-50

The descendants of Naphtali. In the first census, the tribe of Naphtali counted 53,400 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they counted 45,400 men. This was a loss of 8,000 or 15 percent.

⁵¹ This was the number of the Israelites enrolled: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty.

Numbers 26:51

This was the number of the Israelites enrolled. In the first census, Israel counted 603,550 men ready for war; thirty eight years later, they now numbered six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty, a loss of only 1,820 men or just 0.3 percent. Therefore, the total number of men ready for war during the wilderness stayed virtually the same over the thirty eight year period, when the generation of unbelief died in the wilderness.

The stagnation of population is reflective of Israel's spiritual state during these thirty eight years, they should have expected to grow in population, as is normal in the course of generations. Instead, they simply stayed where they were. The thirty eight years in the wilderness were years of no growth, no advance, just going round in circles until the generation of unbelief had died and a generation of faith had arisen, a generation bold enough to take the Promised Land.

During this period, certain tribes suffered significant gains, and certain tribes suffered significant losses. Of these twelve tribes of Israel, five suffered loss, and seven gained men. Half of the tribes had gains or losses 15% or less; but Simeon lost 63% of their population of fighting age men, and Manasseh gained 64%. God was blessing or cursing particular tribes, no doubt related to their abiding with him and their role in opposing him directly.

⁵² The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ⁵³ To these the land shall be apportioned for inheritance according to the number of names. ⁵⁴ To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance; every tribe shall be given its inheritance according to its enrolment. ⁵⁵ But the land shall be apportioned by lot; according to the names of their ancestral tribes they shall inherit. ⁵⁶ Their inheritance shall be apportioned according to lot between the larger and the smaller.

Numbers 26:52-56

To these the land shall be apportioned for inheritance according to the number of names. The final allocation of the land was undertaken by drawing lots and details of the allocations can be found in the Book of Joshua.

⁵⁷ This is the enrolment of the Levites by their clans: of Gershon, the clan of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the clan of the Kohathites; of Merari, the clan of the Merarites. ⁵⁸ These are the clans of Levi: the clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites. Now Kohath was the father of Amram. ⁵⁹ The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam. ⁶⁰ To Aaron were born Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ⁶¹ But Nadab and Abihu died when they offered unholy fire before the Lord. ⁶² The number of those enrolled was twenty-three thousand, every male one month old and upwards; for they were not enrolled among the Israelites because there was no allotment given to them among the Israelites.

Numbers 26:57-62

This is the enrolment of the Levites, for they were not enrolled among the Israelites. The Levites were not numbered as fighting men in either the first or second census, because the men of their tribe were not to go to war. As in Chapter 3, Levites over a month old are counted. Their number has increased from 22,000 to 23,000, comparing Numbers 3:39 with v.62.

Because there was no allotment given to them among the Israelites. As well, they were to receive no inheritance of land as the other tribes; their inheritance was greater than property, the Lord himself: <<*Then the Lord said to Aaron: You shall have no allotment in their land, nor shall you have any share among them; I am your share and your possession among the Israelites*>> (Numbers 18:20).

⁶³ These were those enrolled by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who enrolled the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho. ⁶⁴ Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had enrolled the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. ⁶⁵ For the Lord had said of them, 'They shall die in the wilderness.' Not one of them was left, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

Numbers 26:63-65

Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest. None of those counted in the first census were counted in the second. That was the old generation, the generation of unbelief, who perished in the wilderness: <<***Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness***>> (1 Corinthians 10:5). They obviously had no inheritance in the Promised Land except for Caleb and Joshua, the only two spies to have given a good account that the people should and could have taken the land immediately.