Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 26:1-14

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we will read Numbers chapter 26. Today, we will read verses 1–14.

Forty years earlier, the Israelites had come out of Egypt the day after Passover. Three months later, they arrived in the Wilderness of Sinai, where they stayed for ten months. During this period, they received the Law and built the Tabernacle. On the first day of the second month of the following year, God spoke to Moses and commanded him to take a census of the men in the twelve tribes of Israel. This was the first census of the army. Its purpose was to organize the two million Israelites into an army so that they could begin their journey through the wilderness.

The men counted in the first census all belonged to the first generation of Israelites who had come out of Egypt. Because of their unbelief, this generation was afraid of the inhabitants of Canaan, who were physically imposing and lived in fortified cities. They saw themselves as grasshoppers in comparison and therefore did not dare to enter the good land of Canaan that God had promised them. They even wanted to appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt. Consequently, God did not allow this generation of Israelites to enter the promised land. They began their life of wandering in the wilderness, and thirty-eight years later, all the men of the first generation who had been counted in the census had all died in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb.

The second generation of Israelites grew up in the wilderness. Through their difficult living conditions, they learned to depend on God's gracious provision and to exercise faith. Moses then led this new generation of Israelites from Kadesh. They traveled around the territory of Edom and took a detour around the territory of Moab. Before long, they arrived in the region east of the Jordan River. Under the leadership of the LORD God, they defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king

of Bashan. They took possession of the extensive plains east of the Jordan River and camped at Shittim on the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho on the west side of the Jordan. They were preparing to cross the river and enter the promised land of Canaan that God had promised them.

Because King Balak of Moab feared the growing strength of the Israelites, he invited Balaam, a foreign prophet, to come and curse them. But the LORD God turned Balaam's curses into blessings. When Balaam realized that he could not use the power of evil spirits from the outside to destroy Israel, he came up with another plan: to entice the Israelites into sexual immorality and idol worship. As a result, the Israelites committed both physical immorality and spiritual adultery, provoking God's anger. A total of twenty-four thousand Israelites died in the plague.

Verses 1–2: "And it came to pass, after the plague, that the LORD spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: 'Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel.'"

After the plague, the LORD spoke to Moses and Eleazar, instructing them to take another census of the men of Israel. Thirty-eight years earlier, when the first generation of Israelites was counted for the first time, God had spoken to Moses and Aaron in the Wilderness of Sinai, commanding them to number the army in preparation for their journey through the wilderness. Thirty-eight years later, when the second generation was counted, Aaron the high priest had already died, and his son Eleazar had succeeded him as high priest. The location of this second census was the final destination of their wilderness journey—the plains of Moab. They were now preparing to enter the promised land, take possession of it, and receive their inheritance according to their tribes and families. The principles governing the two censuses were the same, and there were three main requirements.

First, they were to be counted according to their families. The KJV translates the original wording as "father's house," meaning according to their fathers' households. The father is the source of each person's life. Just as our physical life

has a source, our spiritual life also has a source. God wants everyone to respect the source of their life, whether physical or spiritual. Therefore, in the church, we should respect those who have led us to receive God's grace and salvation, those who have taught us to read the Bible and pray, and those who have helped us grow in our spiritual lives. In a direct sense, these people are our spiritual sources. Of course, we can trace this lineage further and further back until we reach the ultimate source of all life—God Himself. Luke 3:38 says, “the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.” When we respect the source of life, we are ultimately respecting God.

Second, they had to be twenty years old and above. Life must grow to a point where a person is able to take responsibility. Little children can only drink milk; they cannot eat solid food. Hebrews 5:13 says, “For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.” We need to recognize that God is a God of love, but He is also a God of righteousness. Only when we understand God's righteousness can we bear the responsibilities He entrusts to us.

Furthermore, according to Ephesians 4:13–16, we must grow into mature believers, attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We must also learn to help one another according to the proper working of each individual part, building up the body of Christ in love. Therefore, besides being able to bear the responsibilities entrusted to us by God, we must also develop our own spiritual gifts so that we can serve appropriately in the life of the church. The Israelites had to reach the age of twenty physically. Similarly, in the life of the church, it often takes many years of growth and accumulation before a person develops sufficient spiritual maturity to function effectively.

Third, they had to be able to go out to war. This means being able to lay aside every entanglement for the sake of God's purpose and go forth to fight His battles. Spiritual warfare is not fought by relying on human strength or fleshly means. Rather, we must put on the whole armor of God and first learn how to protect ourselves. Our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Therefore, every warrior who engages in spiritual warfare must be equipped with the Word of God.

Verses 3–4: “So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them on the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying: ‘Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, just as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt.’”

After receiving God's command, Moses and Eleazar announced to the Israelites on the plains of Moab that they were to take another census of the men in the twelve tribes of Israel. They were to follow exactly the principles God had commanded: they had to be counted according to their families, be twenty years old and above, and be capable of going out to war.

At this time, the entire congregation of Israel was camped on the plains of Moab, and they could see the city of Jericho across the Jordan River. This would be the location of their first battle after entering the promised land. This gave the second organization of the Israelite army a concrete objective. Entering the promised land and taking possession of it was God's promise to Israel. But even with God's promise, the people still needed to cooperate with Him. Therefore, the Israelites had to understand the purpose of the battle, know the principles of warfare, and become skilled in the techniques of fighting. In this way, each tribe would be able to drive out the original inhabitants from the territory assigned to it and take possession of its inheritance.

The following verses, from 5–51, record the census of the men in the twelve tribes. The order in which the tribes are listed is generally the same as the order in Numbers chapter 1, when the first census was taken. The only difference is that the order of the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim has been reversed. Another difference is that the first census of the army recorded only the leaders of each tribe, whereas the second census also recorded the individual families within each tribe. The names of these families generally correspond to the sons and grandsons of Jacob listed in Genesis 46:8–27, when Jacob brought his household of seventy people down to Egypt. These grandsons later developed into family groups. Some disappeared because they had no descendants, while several new family groups emerged. This also clearly demonstrates God's special blessing.

Verses 5–7: “Reuben was the firstborn of Israel. The children of Reuben were: of Hanoch, the family of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the family of the Palluites; of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the family of the Carmites. These are the families of the Reubenites: those who were numbered were forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty.”

Reuben was Jacob's firstborn son. However, when Jacob blessed his sons before his death, he said of Reuben in Genesis 49:4, “Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it—He went up to my couch.”

When Ezra the scribe compiled the book of Chronicles, he added an explanation. 1 Chronicles 5:1 says, “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright.” Reuben's birthright was transferred to Joseph. Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, were counted as sons of Jacob, and each received a portion of the inheritance. In this way, Joseph received the double portion associated with the birthright.

Reuben's original four sons—Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi—became the four family groups within the tribe of Reuben. According to these four families, the total number of men twenty years old and above who were able to go out to war was forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty. If we look at Numbers 1:21, we find that the total number of men in the first census was forty-six thousand five hundred. Comparing the two censuses, the number had decreased by two thousand seven hundred and seventy. The following verses explain why.

Verses 8–10: “And the son of Pallu was Eliab. The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD; and the earth opened its mouth and

swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign."

The rebellion of Korah's company is recorded in Numbers chapter 16, which we have already read. I encourage the saints to review our daily Bible reading on that chapter. We will not go into further detail here. The two men who took the lead in rebelling together with Korah were Dathan and Abiram. They were sons of Eliab, who belonged to the family of Pallu in the tribe of Reuben. God Himself carried out judgment. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the people and livestock belonging to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. In addition, fire came from heaven and consumed the two hundred and fifty leaders who had joined them in rebellion. They were not priests, yet they took censers and offered profane fire. Consequently, they were consumed by fire. They became a warning from God.

The following day, the congregation of Israel rose up and attacked Moses and Aaron because of what had happened. The LORD God then sent a plague among the Israelites. Moses immediately instructed Aaron to take a censer, put fire from the altar into it, add incense, and stand among the people to make atonement for Israel. Aaron stood between the living and the dead, and the plague was stopped. As a result, a total of 14,700 people died from the plague. Quite a number of them were probably from the tribe of Reuben. This would explain why the tribe of Reuben had lost 2,770 men.

The passage also specifically mentions that Eliab had another son named Nemuel, who did not participate in the rebellion and was therefore preserved. This was truly remarkable. Nemuel was able to overcome the pressure of family relationships and remain faithful to the authority and order established by God. In church life today, one of the main reasons divisions arise is that people place greater importance on their relationships with other people than on their relationship with God. God's mission for the church is to accomplish His plan of bringing all things into unity, so that all things may be united in Jesus Christ. If the church itself cannot be united, how can it bear witness for Christ?

Verse 11: “Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.”

Korah belonged to the Kohathite clan of the tribe of Levi. Korah had taken the lead in rebelling against the authority of Moses and Aaron. When the Holy Spirit recorded the tribe of Reuben, He specifically added this sentence: “Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.” This was truly a special act of God's mercy. The children of Korah had not participated in their father's rebellion, so God preserved them. From among Korah's descendants, Samuel later arose as a man who changed the course of an era. Psalmists also arose from his descendants and wrote the psalms attributed to the sons of Korah. In addition, Heman arose as a singer who led the people in offering worship and praise to God in David's choir.

Verses 12–14: “The sons of Simeon according to their families were: of Nemuel, the family of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the family of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the family of the Jachinites; of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites; of Shaul, the family of the Shaulites. These are the families of the Simeonites: twenty-two thousand two hundred.”

Simeon was Jacob's second son. In the blessing Jacob gave to his sons, he could not forget the incident in which Simeon and Levi joined together to slaughter all the males in the city of Shechem. Therefore, Genesis 49:7 says, “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel.” When cruel and violent people gather together, they are likely to cause trouble. Therefore, they needed to be scattered throughout the land of Israel.

According to Genesis 46:10, Simeon had six sons. One of them, Ohad, disappeared because he had no descendants. The remaining five sons became the five family groups within the tribe of Simeon: Nemuel, Jamin, Jachin, Zerah, and Shaul. Among these five families, the total number of men twenty years old and above who were able to go out to war was twenty-two thousand two hundred. If we look at Numbers 1:23, we find that the first census of the army recorded a total of fifty-nine thousand three hundred men. The tribe of Simeon had astonishingly decreased by thirty-seven thousand one hundred men, a reduction of sixty-three percent.

If we remember the incident in Numbers chapter 25, when the Israelites committed sexual immorality with the women of Midian, we will recall that Zimri, who was struck down by Phinehas with a spear, was a leader of the tribe of Simeon. When leaders take the lead in doing evil, their example is easily followed by those under them. It is likely that many people in the tribe of Simeon participated in both physical immorality and spiritual adultery. In that incident, a total of twenty-four thousand people died in the plague, and many of them were probably from the tribe of Simeon. However, the number of Simeonites who died was far greater than twenty-four thousand. Perhaps we can infer that in each of the previous incidents—the rebellion of Korah, the attacks of the fiery serpents, or the disputes over food—there were also people from the tribe of Simeon who participated. This may explain why their numbers decreased so dramatically.

In the first census, the tribe of Simeon ranked third in population. By the second census, however, it had become the smallest tribe, leaving it too weak to obtain an inheritance on its own. Joshua 19:9 tells us that the inheritance of the Simeonites was taken from the territory belonging to the people of Judah. This also fulfilled Jacob's prophecy that the tribe of Simeon would be scattered throughout the land of Israel.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, through our reading about the second census of the Israelite army, we see that both the tribes of Reuben and Simeon suffered a decrease in their numbers because they participated in acts of rebellion. This reminds us that we need to live godly lives in Jesus Christ and leave a good example for our descendants. In the life of the church, we must respect the authority established by God and refuse to participate in any act of rebellion. We must overcome the pressure of human relationships, the enticements and temptations of the world, and remain single-hearted and pure in our devotion to You. In this way, not only will we ourselves be blessed, but our descendants will also be blessed. May the Lord protect and bless my daily life. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.