Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Unedited by the speaker, for personal study only) Numbers 26:15–27

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 26. Today, we are reading verses 15 through 27.

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness for nearly forty years, eventually arriving at the plains of Moab east of the Jordan River. Except for Joshua and Caleb, all the men of Israel numbered in the first generation had died in the wilderness. God instructed Moses and Eleazar to number the second generation of Israelite men: according to their fathers' houses, all who were twenty years old and above who were able to go to war, to count the total number of the men.

This military organization was formed in order to enter the good land, drive out the Canaanites, and possess the land as an inheritance, which would then be divided according to their numbers. According to God's command, Moses and Eleazar began numbering the army, starting with the tribe of Reuben, followed by the tribe of Simeon. Yesterday, we already read about these two tribes, whose numbers were noticeably fewer than during the first census. In particular, the tribe of Simeon had decreased by 63%, making it the smallest tribe in the second census. When the Israelites encamped, the camp of Reuben guarded the south side of the tabernacle, comprising the three tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. Next to be numbered was the tribe of Gad.

Verses 15–18: "The sons of Gad according to their families were: of Zephon, the family of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the family of the Haggites; of Shuni, the family of the Shunites; of Ozni, the family of the Oznites; of Eri, the family of the Erites; of Arod, the family of the Arodites; of Areli, the family of the Arelites. These are the families of the sons of Gad according to those who were numbered of them: forty thousand five hundred."

If we look back at Genesis 46:16, when Jacob took his family of seventy into Egypt, Gad had seven sons, and each son became a clan: the Zephonites, the Haggites, the Shunites, the Oznites, the Erites, the Arodites, and the Arelites. Please note, saints, that there is a slight difference between these two records. This may be because the same person's name had two different spellings, or one was the original name while the other was a nickname. In any case, Gad's original seven sons later became seven clans. Among these seven clans, there were 40,500 men aged twenty and older who were able to go to war. In the first military census, Numbers 1:25 records that the total number for the tribe of Gad was 45,650, which means their number decreased by 5,150.

Remarkably, all three tribes in the camp of Reuben guarding the south side of the tabernacle—Reuben, Simeon, and Gad—decreased in number by the time of the second census. As we mentioned previously, in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben were the ringleaders; and in the incident of immorality on the plains of Moab, Zimri, a leader of the tribe of Simeon, actually brought a Midianite woman into the camp of Israel to commit open immorality. In these two incidents, a total of 41,000 Israelites died from the plagues, a large portion of whom came from the three tribes of the camp of Reuben.

Yet, when the entire camp of Reuben was numbered the second time, their total population had decreased by 45,000, which was even greater than the total death toll from both plagues combined. Therefore, it is very likely that during the successive incidents of strife and rebellion, all three tribes in the camp of Reuben participated. The tribe of Reuben, dissatisfied with losing the firstborn birthright, frequently seized opportunities to stir up trouble. The tribe of Simeon was naturally fierce and unrestrained. Dwelling alongside these two tribes, the tribe of Gad was negatively influenced—which was truly a shame.

Before Moses departed from this life, he also blessed the twelve tribes of Israel, as recorded in Deuteronomy 33. Concerning Reuben, in Deuteronomy 33:6, Moses merely said: "Let Reuben live, and not die, Nor let his men be few." Moses seemed unable to think of good words to bless him with. Regarding the tribe of Simeon, Moses had nothing to say at all, so there is no record of any blessing for Simeon.

Evidently, the incident of immorality on the plains of Moab left such a deep impression on Moses that he could not speak a blessing over them. Only for the tribe of Gad did Moses offer a very rich blessing. In Deuteronomy 33:20–21, "And of Gad he said: 'Blessed is he who enlarges Gad; He dwells as a lion, And tears off the arm, yes, and the crown of the head. He provided the first part for himself, because a lawgiver's portion was reserved there. He came with the heads of the people; he administered the justice of the Lord, and His judgments with Israel.'"

Next, Moses and Eleazar began numbering the camp of Judah encamped on the east side of the tabernacle, which included the three tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

Verses 19–22: "The sons of Judah were Er and Onan; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Judah according to their families were: of Shelah, the family of the Shelanites; of Perez, the family of the Perezites; of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites. And the sons of Perez were: of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the family of the Hamulites. These are the families of Judah according to those who were numbered of them: seventy-six thousand five hundred."

According to Genesis 38, Judah originally had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er married Tamar, but the Lord saw that Er was wicked and put him to death early. Judah then told Onan to marry Tamar in order to raise up an heir for his brother. Knowing that the offspring would not be his, Onan spilled his semen on the ground whenever he lay with her, unwilling to provide an heir for his brother. The Lord saw this evil that Onan did, and He put him to death as well.

Seeing that two of his sons had died in succession, Judah told Tamar to return to her father's house, promising that when Shelah grew up, he would marry her according to custom to raise up heirs for Shelah's two older brothers. Later, when Shelah had grown up, Judah did not fulfill his promise. Tamar then disguised herself as a harlot along the road where Judah was going to shear his sheep, veiled her face, and slept with Judah, taking his personal pledges as a guarantee. The next

day, when Judah wanted to redeem his pledges, he could not find the harlot. Three months later, Judah was informed that his daughter-in-law Tamar was pregnant, and he made a great public display to demand accountability. Unexpectedly, Tamar produced Judah's pledges, revealing that the child belonged to him. Judah immediately admitted his error, confessing his own unrighteousness in not giving Shelah to her in marriage, and acknowledged that Tamar was more righteous than he.

Tamar gave birth to twins, Perez and Zerah, and these two children were recorded under Judah's name, counting as heirs for Er and Onan. Thus, the tribe of Judah had three clans: Shelah, Perez, and Zerah. Perez's other two sons, Hezron and Hamul, later grew into great clans as well, giving the tribe of Judah five clans: the Shelanites, the Perezites, the Zarhites, the Hezronites, and the Hamulites.

In Matthew chapter 1, the genealogy of Jesus Christ is recounted. Matthew 1:3 says, "Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram;" Jesus Christ came forth from this very clan of Hezron. Not only so, but King David also came from this clan. Judah thus became the kingly tribe, and when Christ Jesus returns to unite all things in Himself, He will be the eternal King. All things work together for good to those who love God; everything that happens is within God's eternal purpose. Judah was a man full of flaws, yet he was courageous enough to admit his faults and willing, according to God's righteousness, to bear the responsibility he ought to bear. Thus, Judah became the royal tribe.

Dear brothers and sisters, the condition for reigning together with Christ in the future is not difficult: just like Judah, to know God's will, obey God's will, and shoulder the responsibilities we ought to bear; in this way we can be blessed and reign with Christ.

According to the five clans, the men of the tribe of Judah who were twenty years old and above, able to go to war, totaled 76,500. In the first census, Numbers 1:27 records that the total number for the tribe of Judah was 74,600; the second census showed an increase of 1,900. In both censuses, the tribe of Judah was the most

numerous and the most formidable tribe; whenever the Israelites journeyed forward, the tribe of Judah was also the first to take the lead.

Verses 23–25: "The sons of Issachar according to their families were: of Tola, the family of the Tolaites; of Puah, the family of the Punites; of Jashub, the family of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the family of the Shimronites. These are the families of Issachar according to those who were numbered of them: sixty-four thousand three hundred."

According to Genesis 46:13, Issachar had four sons, and these four sons became the four clans of the tribe of Issachar: the Tolaites, the Punites, the Jashubites, and the Shimronites. According to these four clans, the men twenty years old and above who were able to go out to battle numbered 64,300 in all. In the first census, Numbers 1:29 records that the total number for the tribe of Issachar was 54,400, reflecting an increase of 9,900 in the second census.

In Genesis 49:14–15, "Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens; He saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant; He bowed his shoulder to bear a burden, and became a band of slaves." In Jacob's blessing of Issachar, he called him a strong donkey that quietly bows its shoulder to bear burdens and labor faithfully; therefore God blessed him to be fruitful and multiply, giving him fertile land. Today, the prosperity of every church relies not only on the leadership of the kingly tribe, but also indispensably on the laborious service of the tribe of Issachar. They do not boast or flaunt themselves; they simply serve quietly, and God pours out His abundant blessings upon them.

Verses 26–27: "The sons of Zebulun according to their families were: of Sered, the family of the Sardites; of Elon, the family of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the family of the Jahleelites. These are the families of the Zebulunites according to those who were numbered of them: sixty thousand five hundred."

According to Genesis 46:14, Zebulun had three sons, and these three sons became the three clans of the tribe of Zebulun: the Sardites, the Elonites, and the Jahleelites. Among these three clans, the men twenty years old and above who were able to go out to war totaled 60,500. In the first census, Numbers 1:31 records that the total number for the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400; the second census showed an increase of 3,100.

In Genesis 49:13, Jacob's blessing for Zebulun was: "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon." In New Testament terms, this represents an outlet for the gospel, carrying the gospel to all inhabited lands. The three tribes of the camp of Judah encamped east of the tabernacle toward the sunrise, marching at the very forefront under the triumphant banner. With Judah's kingly vision and leadership, Issachar's diligent labor, and Zebulun's expanding borders, the harmonious coordination of these three tribes was the guarantee of victory.

After enduring forty years of wilderness life, the three tribes in the camp of Judah had all increased in number. Taking hardship as their bread and affliction as their water, the trials they experienced actually caused them to become stronger and more fruitful. The blessing that Moses pronounced over Zebulun and Issachar before his death was also beautiful; in Deuteronomy 33:18–19, "And of Zebulun he said: 'Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, And Issachar, in your tents! They shall call the peoples to the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness; for they shall partake of the abundance of the seas and of treasures hidden in the sand.'"

Rejoicing when going out, glad in their tents, offering sacrifices upon the mountain, drawing forth treasures from the sea, and leading the nations to worship God—is this not the most wonderful depiction of church life today?

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You for leading us through the book of Numbers. As we compare the two censuses, we see that all three tribes in the camp of Reuben decreased in number, while all three tribes in the camp of Judah increased in number; this is indeed a sobering reminder to us. Grant us a kingly

vision, a heart of laborious service, and the courage to expand our borders, so that the church may experience Your abundant blessings just as the three tribes in the camp of Judah did. May every saint in the church shoulder responsibility and serve faithfully. Grant us many gospel outlets to spread the gospel throughout the regions surrounding the church, and draw sons of peace into the church to offer You praise and worship. Bless my local church and our church life. In the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray.