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

Numbers 26: 28-41

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers. Today we will read chapter 26 verses 28 to 41.

Moses and Eleazar conducted the second census of the men of the twelve tribes of Israel on the plains of Moab. This census was for the purpose of preparing for the battle to enter the good land and take possession of their inheritance, as well as for distributing the land according to the number of people in each tribe.We have already read about the camp of Reuben, which was stationed on the south side and consisted of three tribes: Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. The populations of all three tribes had decreased compared with the first census of the army. Among them, the tribe of Simeon had decreased by 63 percent, making it the smallest tribe.We have also read about the camp of Judah, which was stationed on the east side and consisted of three tribes: Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The population of each of these tribes had increased steadily. Among them, the tribe of Judah was the largest in both censuses.

Next, the census was to cover the camp of Ephraim, which was stationed on the west side and consisted of three tribes: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph. Jacob intended to give Joseph the birthright of the firstborn, so he adopted Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons, making them two separate tribes of Israel. This meant that they could receive a double portion of the land when the inheritance was distributed.

Manasseh was originally Joseph's firstborn son. However, when Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons, he crossed his hands and gave precedence to Ephraim as the firstborn son. Therefore, in the first census of the army, Ephraim was counted first, followed by Manasseh. But in the second census, the order was reversed: Manasseh was counted first, followed by Ephraim.The reason for this change is not

entirely clear. Perhaps the tribe of Manasseh had received great blessing during the years in the wilderness, and its population had increased considerably. Therefore, the tribe of Manasseh was counted first. Nevertheless, in the later history of Israel, Ephraim continued to hold the position of greater prominence.

Verse 28-34: "The sons of Joseph according to their families, by Manasseh and Ephraim, were: The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites; and Machir begot Gilead; of Gilead, the family of the Gileadites. These are the sons of Gilead: of Jeezer, the family of the Jeezerites; of Helek, the family of the Helekites; of Asriel, the family of the Asrielites; of Shechem, the family of the Shechemites; of Shemida, the family of the Shemidaites; of Hepher, the family of the Hepherites. Now Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. These are the families of Manasseh; and those who were numbered of them were fifty-two thousand seven hundred."

At the time of the first census of the men, according to Numbers 1:35, the tribe of Manasseh had a total of 32,200 men, making it the smallest of the twelve tribes. However, in the second census, which counted the men of the new generation, the total had increased to 52,700, an increase of 20,500 people. In percentage terms, this was a 64 percent increase, the greatest population growth among all twelve tribes. The Bible does not directly tell us the reason for this. We can only make some observations based on the brief records in these few verses.

When Jacob brought his entire family down to Egypt to join Joseph, Joseph was already married and had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Among the descendants of Manasseh, only one clan emerged: the clan of Machir. Among Machir's sons, only one clan emerged as well: the clan of Gilead. In the beginning, this tribe had very few people, with its lineage extending through only one son in each of two successive generations. This was also why it became the smallest tribe in the first census.

However, by the time of Gilead, the situation within the tribe had completely changed. Six clans emerged from among Gilead's sons: the clan of Iezer, the clan of Helek, the clan of Asriel, the clan of Shechem, the clan of Shemida, and the clan of Hepher. If we calculate the generations according to the timeline, Moses was in the fourth generation of the tribe of Levi (Levi fathered Kohath, Kohath fathered Amram, and Amram fathered Moses). Likewise, Gilead was also in the fourth generation from Joseph. Levi was Jacob's third son, while Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son, so Joseph should have been more than ten years younger than Levi.

Joseph was sold into Egypt when he was still in his teens. Later, he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. It was not until he was thirty years old that he was released and became the governor of Egypt. Joseph married relatively late in life. When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, he was exactly eighty years old. At that time, Gilead was probably still a young man, and his six sons were likely all under the age of twenty. Therefore, they were not included among the men counted in the first census.

Gilead's father and grandfather had relatively few descendants, but beginning with Gilead's generation, the family began to flourish. At that time, all the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness. Their external material conditions were not abundant, yet God provided manna and living water for them every day. Gilead's entire family grew in number and enjoyed harmony within the household, and they were filled with gratitude toward God. Gilead's sons grew up in this healthy environment. They became men who feared God, valued their families, and did not take part in the various disputes and quarrels among the Israelites. Eventually, Gilead's six sons each developed into a separate clan. Thus, by the time of the second census of the men, the tribe of Manasseh had eight clans in total, and its population had increased dramatically by 64 percent, making it the largest tribe in the camp of Ephraim.

Even more remarkable is that within the clan of Hepher, Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, had no sons but had five daughters. Their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. Biblical genealogies usually record only the names of the men, but here the names of these five women are specifically recorded. This

serves as a foreshadowing of the question in the next chapter: Can women inherit property?

I believe that from the time of Abraham to the days of Moses, a period of four hundred years had passed. During that time, there must have been many families without male descendants that simply disappeared from the genealogical records. No one had ever raised any questions about this. But Zelophehad's five daughters were unwilling to accept this situation. They boldly sought to secure the right to preserve their father's name. This was a rather progressive idea in the society of that time. In the next chapter, we will look more closely at how God dealt with this matter.

The fact that the names of these five women appear in the genealogical record also indicates that the tribe of Manasseh was quite successful in raising its children. Their children, whether male or female, were independent and strong, and they were willing to stand up and argue for their rights on reasonable grounds. Perhaps this was also one of the reasons why the tribe of Manasseh was able to multiply and become so numerous despite the harsh conditions of life in the wilderness.

Verse 35-37: "These are the sons of Ephraim according to their families: of Shuthelah, the family of the Shuthalhites; of Becher, the family of the Bachrites; of Tahan, the family of the Tahanites. And these are the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the family of the Eranites. These are the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those who were numbered of them: thirty-two thousand five hundred. These are the sons of Joseph according to their families."

At the time of the first census of the men, Numbers 1:33 tells us that the tribe of Ephraim had a total of 40,500 men. In the second census, however, the number was 32,500, a decrease of 8,000. The Bible does not explain the reason for this decline. Three clans emerged from among the descendants of Ephraim: the clan of Shuthelah, the clan of Becher, and the clan of Tahan. Another clan, the clan of Eran, later emerged from among the descendants of Shuthelah. Thus, the tribe of Ephraim had four clans in total.

Ephraim and Manasseh were both sons of Joseph. The combined population of these two tribes was 85,200, which was 8,700 more than the tribe of Judah, the largest tribe in terms of population. This fulfilled Jacob's prophecy concerning Joseph in Genesis 49:22, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall." Genesis 49:25 also says, "By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb."

Not only did Jacob bless Joseph, but Moses also gave Joseph a special blessing before his death. Deuteronomy 33:13–16 says, "And of Joseph he said: 'Blessed of the LORD is his land, With the precious things of heaven, with the dew, And the deep lying beneath; With the precious fruits of the sun, With the precious produce of the months, With the best things of the ancient mountains, With the precious things of the everlasting hills, With the precious things of the earth and its fullness, And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let the blessing come "on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers."' Joseph's descendants were truly blessed, receiving all kinds of precious things. At the end of Moses' blessing, he added one more statement in Deuteronomy 33:17, "They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."

At the time of the second census of the army, the tribe of Manasseh was especially blessed, experiencing the greatest population growth. Yet Moses still remembered that Jacob had transferred the birthright of the firstborn to Ephraim. Moses also could not forget that among the twelve spies, Caleb, who brought back a good report and urged the Israelites to enter Canaan and take possession of the land, came from the tribe of Judah, while Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim. In the next chapter, we will read about how Joshua succeeded Moses in his ministry and was to lead the Israelites into the good land. This is why Moses declared, "The ten thousands of Ephraim, and the thousands of Manasseh."

Verse 38-41: " The sons of Benjamin according to their families were: of Bela, the family of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the family of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the family of the Ahiramites; of Shupham, the family of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the family of the Huphamites. And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: of Ard, the family of the Ardites; of Naaman, the family of the Naamites. These are the sons of Benjamin according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were forty-five thousand six hundred."

When Jacob brought his family of seventy people down to Egypt, according to Genesis 46:21, his youngest son, Benjamin, had ten sons. Five of them eventually became separate clans: the clan of Bela, the clan of Ashbel, the clan of Ahiram, the clan of Shupham, and the clan of Hupham. Two of Bela's descendants also became separate clans: the clan of Ard and the clan of Naaman. Thus, the tribe of Benjamin had seven clans. Among these seven clans, the total number of men twenty years old and above who were able to go out to war was 45,600. At the time of the first census of the men, according to Numbers 1:37, the total population of the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400. This means that the tribe had increased by 10,200 people, showing that they had also been greatly blessed during their years of wandering in the wilderness.

Jacob's prophecy concerning Benjamin described him as a ravenous wolf. In Genesis 49:27, this prophecy foretold that the tribe would be fierce, inclined to act collectively, and very united. These characteristics eventually led them into great trouble. In Judges 20 and 21, the tribe of Benjamin came close to being wiped out entirely. It was only when the Israelites were offering burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD that they realized one tribe was missing. They then began to regret what had happened and made every effort to remedy the situation.

Moses' prophecy concerning the tribe of Benjamin is found in Deuteronomy 33:12, "Of Benjamin he said: 'The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by Him, Who shelters him all the day long; And he shall dwell between His shoulders.'" Later, the city of Jerusalem was located within the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, and the Temple of Israel was built between the two mountains within Benjamin's territory.

This is precisely what is meant by the words, “He shall dwell between His shoulders.”

The camp of Ephraim, stationed on the west side of the Tabernacle, consisted of three tribes: Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin. The total population of this camp increased by 22,700, making it the camp with the greatest population increase among the four camps surrounding the Tabernacle. Furthermore, all three tribes in the camp of Ephraim were descendants of Rachel, Jacob’s beloved wife. Although Rachel was deeply loved by Jacob throughout her life, she was continually troubled by the fact that she had no children. Finally, God heard her prayer and gave her Joseph, bringing comfort to her heart.

When she gave birth to her second son, Benjamin, who was also Jacob’s youngest son, she died from the difficult childbirth at Ephrath (Ephrath is Bethlehem, the place where Jesus Christ was born). During her lifetime, Rachel experienced some sorrow and disappointment concerning childbearing. Yet when the Israelites passed through the great and terrible wilderness, the camp of Ephraim, made up of Rachel’s descendants, became the camp with the greatest population increase. Perhaps this was also God’s answer to Rachel’s prayer.

Let us pray together: Dear heavenly Father, thank You for being a God who hears our prayers. Although we do not always understand the way You answer us, if we patiently wait upon You to the very end, we will discover that Your guidance is indeed the best answer to our prayers. Through the experience of the camp of Ephraim in the wilderness, let us see that even though our circumstances may be difficult, Your provision is still with us. As long as we maintain a joyful heart, take good care of our families, and raise healthy children, our families can pass through difficult times and yet live out a testimony of Your blessing. Therefore, we ask You to give us a thankful heart, so that even in difficult circumstances, we may count Your blessings and become a testimony of Your goodness. Please bless my life today, and I commit tomorrow into Your gracious hands. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.