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

Numbers 26: 42-56

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 26. Today, we are reading verses 42 through 56.

Moses and Eleazar conducted the second census on the plains of Moab, counting the men twenty years old and above who were able to go to war, according to their families. We have already read about the camp of Reuben on the south side of the tabernacle, the camp of Judah on the east side, and the camp of Ephraim on the west side. Only the camp of Dan on the north side remains. The camp of Dan included three tribes: Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. These three tribes were all descendants of Jacob's two maidservants.

Verses 42-43: "These are the sons of Dan according to their families: of Shuham, the family of the Shuhamites. These are the families of Dan according to their families. All the families of the Shuhamites, according to those who were numbered of them, were sixty-four thousand four hundred."

The record of the tribe of Dan is very brief. When Jacob took his entire household to Egypt to escape the famine in the land of Canaan, Genesis 46:23 recorded that Dan had only one son, Hushim, who was also called Shuham. The tribe of Dan had only one clan—the family of the Shuhamites. Logically speaking, if there was only one clan, its population should have been small. However, at the first census of the men of the tribe of Dan, Numbers 1:39 recorded a total of 62,700 men. Among the twelve tribes, Dan had the second-largest population, surpassed only by the tribe of Judah. By the second census, the total was 64,400, an increase of 1,700 men. Dan still ranked second only to Judah, maintaining its position as the tribe with the second-largest population.

This shows that although the tribe of Dan multiplied greatly, the leaders of the family of the Shuhamites consistently maintained very strong leadership and control, so that no one else could rise to prominence and develop a new clan. Looking at the positive side, the tribe of Dan had a stable structure, its descendants were highly obedient, and the leaders of the clan possessed strong authority. Their commands could be issued and carried out efficiently, enabling Dan to become a powerful tribe. Therefore, Jacob prophesied in Genesis 49:16, "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel." Judges chapters 13 through 16 describe Samson of the tribe of Dan, who served as a judge of Israel for twenty years.

However, Jacob added another sentence to his prophecy. Genesis 49:17 says, "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward." This reveals the negative side of the tribe of Dan. Dan had only one clan and only one leader. Once the leader went astray, it would be very difficult to correct the situation. Consequently, Dan would become a serpent by the way and a viper by the path, becoming a source of trouble for the Israelites.

After entering the good land, the territory allotted to the tribe of Dan was the region between the western side of Judah and the Mediterranean Sea. That land had fertile soil and abundant rainfall and could produce plentiful crops, enough to support the large population of the tribe of Dan. However, the tribe of Dan never drove out the Philistines. Judges chapter 18 records that the tribe of Dan migrated northward to Laish, drove out its inhabitants, and renamed the city Dan. The city of Dan then became the northernmost city of Israel. Judges 18:30 says, "Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land." The tribe of Dan not only migrated northward but also established idols there and privately appointed a descendant of Moses to serve as priest. This was completely contrary to God's commandments.

During the period of the northern kingdom of Israel, King Jeroboam did not want the people of the northern kingdom to go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and worship God. Therefore, he placed a golden calf in the northern city of Dan,

establishing another idol and center of worship. 1 Kings 12:30 records, “Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.” The tribe of Dan became a source of trouble and a snare to the Israelites, just as Jacob had said, becoming a serpent by the way and a viper by the path. After the kingdom of Israel was destroyed, Dan became a lost tribe. Historically, there is almost no trace of where the descendants of Dan went.

Therefore, near the end of the age, when the angels seal the Israelites to protect them, Revelation 7:4-8 records that 12,000 from each tribe are sealed, making a total of 144,000 from the twelve tribes. These twelve tribes include the tribe of Levi, but the tribe of Dan alone is missing. In other words, during the great tribulation, the tribe of Dan does not receive God’s protection.

Fortunately, God is rich in grace and mercy. When the new heaven and new earth come and the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, the city has twelve gates, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on them. This is recorded in Ezekiel 48:31-34. These twelve names are precisely the names of Jacob’s original twelve sons: Joseph replaces Ephraim and Manasseh, and the name of Dan appears again. God, in His faithfulness, has preserved the tribe of Dan.

Verses 44-47: “These are the sons of Asher according to their families: of Jimna, the family of the Jimnites; of Jesui, the family of the Jesuites; of Beriah, the family of the Beriites. Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the family of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the family of the Malchielites. And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah. These are the families of the sons of Asher according to those who were numbered of them: fifty-three thousand four hundred.”

When Jacob went to Egypt, Genesis 46:17 recorded that Asher had four sons and a daughter named Serah. We do not know what Serah did, but she must have been a special person, which is why her name was recorded in the genealogy. Among Asher’s four sons, three developed into three clans: the family of the Jimnites, the family of the Jesuites, and the family of the Beriites. From the sons of Beriah, two more clans developed: the family of the Heberites and the family of the

Malchielites. Thus, the tribe of Asher had five clans. According to their clans, there were a total of 53,400 men twenty years old and above who were able to go to war.

At the first census, Numbers 1:41 recorded a total of 41,500 men in the tribe of Asher, so the population had increased by 11,900. Asher was a blessed tribe. Jacob's blessing to Asher was also very beautiful. Genesis 49:20 says, "Bread from Asher shall be rich, And he shall yield royal dainties." This indicates that the land of Asher would produce abundant food, be famous for fine food, and supply delicacies fit for kings. Moses' blessing to Asher was also very beautiful. Deuteronomy 33:24 says, "Asher is most blessed of sons; Let him be favored by his brothers, And let him dip his foot in oil." Asher would have many children and descendants and abundant produce, to the point that he could even dip his foot in oil. How wonderful this was!

Verses 48-50: "The sons of Naphtali according to their families: of Jahzeel, the family of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the family of the Gunites; of Jezer, the family of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the family of the Shillemites. These are the families of Naphtali according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were forty-five thousand four hundred."

When Jacob went to Egypt, Genesis 46:24 shows us that Naphtali had four sons. All four sons developed into four clans: the family of the Jahzeelites, the family of the Gunites, the family of the Jezerites, and the family of the Shillemites. Naphtali and Dan were both sons born to Zilpah, Rachel's maidservant. One characteristic shared by these two tribes was their stable structure. Dan had only one clan, while Naphtali had four clans. All these clans originated from their sons, and no new clans appeared afterward. Perhaps this was a coincidence, or perhaps the children of maidservants had learned the lesson of obedience from an early age and were unwilling to push themselves forward. This characteristic may have produced the stable structure of the entire tribe.

At the second census, the tribe of Naphtali had a total of 45,400 men. At the first census, Numbers 1:43 recorded a total of 53,400 men, a decrease of 8,000. The

Bible does not tell us the reason. Jacob's blessing to Naphtali was very good. Genesis 49:21 says, "Naphtali is a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words." Moses' blessing was also very good. Deuteronomy 33:23 says: "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, And full of the blessing of the LORD, Possess the west and the south."

Verse 51: "These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty."

This verse summarizes the second census of the men. The total number of men counted among the Israelites was 601,730. Compared with the total number at the first census, there were only 1,820 fewer men, a decrease of 0.3 percent, less than one percent. At first glance, it seems that the population had hardly changed. However, upon closer examination, we discover that the tribe of Simeon had decreased by 63 percent, while the tribe of Manasseh had increased by 64 percent.

Among the twelve tribes, seven experienced population increases: the three tribes in the camp of Judah—Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the two tribes in the camp of Ephraim—Manasseh and Benjamin; and the two tribes in the camp of Dan—Dan and Asher. Five tribes experienced population decreases, including the three tribes in the camp of Reuben—Reuben, Simeon, and Gad—together with Ephraim and Naphtali.

Verses 52-54: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them.'"

Greed is part of fallen human nature. Everyone wants to receive a larger inheritance. Even within a family, disputes over the distribution of parents' inheritance frequently end up in court. Therefore, dividing the land as an

inheritance was not an easy matter. God first told Moses the principles for distributing the inheritance. The details would be left to Joshua, who would divide the land according to the principles God had revealed to Moses after they actually entered the good land. The first principle for distributing the land was to divide it fairly according to the number of people: those with larger populations would receive larger inheritances, while those with smaller populations would receive smaller inheritances. The size of each inheritance would be determined according to the population, first by tribe, then by clan, and finally by individual family.

Therefore, at the second census, the men twenty years old and above who were able to go to war had to be counted according to their tribes, clans, and fathers' households, so that corresponding inheritances could be allotted to them. This shows that they first had to fight, drive out the original inhabitants, and then obtain the land as their inheritance. Afterward, they also had to be able to maintain their inheritance, cultivate the land at the proper times, and raise livestock. Every part of this process required sufficient manpower and ability.

Having an accurate population count was the first step in distributing the land. Dividing the land according to population could determine the size of each inheritance. However, land is not merely a matter of size; its location is also important. Fertile land is more valuable than barren land, and flat land is easier to cultivate than mountainous land. Therefore, besides population, another principle was needed for distributing the land.

Verses 55-56: "But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller."

The other principle was casting lots, that is, drawing lots. This means that the distribution was according to God's sovereign arrangement. The Israelites were to cast lots according to their tribes, first determining the location of each tribe's territory, while the size of its territory would be determined according to the population of the tribe. In the Old Testament age, the Spirit of God did not dwell

within people. When people wanted to understand God's will, they used the method of casting lots. Proverbs 16:33 says: "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." Therefore, in the Old Testament, casting or drawing lots was frequently used to reveal God's will.

In the New Testament, the last use of casting lots is recorded in Acts 1:26. In order to fill the position among the twelve apostles, the disciples first selected two men and then cast lots. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas and was numbered with the other eleven apostles. After this event, the Day of Pentecost came, and the Holy Spirit was poured out. From that time onward, the New Testament saints no longer used the method of casting lots, but were led directly by the Holy Spirit, who directly revealed God's will.

After Joshua led the Israelites into the good land, he followed God's command and used the method of casting lots to determine the location of each tribe's inheritance. Their territories were named according to the names of their tribes, emphasizing that each tribe's location was allotted according to God's will. All the men counted in the second census were remembered by God, and all were able to receive an inheritance.

Dear brothers and sisters, today God also blesses us according to these two principles. First, we must have a position in which we can receive blessings. Just as the locations of the territories of the twelve tribes of Israel were determined by God, today, under God's leading, every church should also develop its own vision and commission, so that every saint in the church may have a suitable position.

Second, every saint should receive blessings corresponding to the measure of his spiritual life. In this way, the blessings God gives to the church can be realized in every saint. After receiving blessings, every saint rises up to serve God and fulfill his ministry and commission. Thus, as each person fulfills his own function, exercises his gifts, and helps one another, the church is built up in love, displaying the beauty and glory of the church.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, You are the good Shepherd. You call Your own sheep by name. We hear Your voice and follow You. Thank You for knowing every one of us. You know our strengths, and You also know our weaknesses. You lead us according to the will of God the Father and help us understand God's will and commission for us. You preserve and lead us in our daily lives, helping us grow in life, perfecting our gifts, and developing our functions according to the will of God the Father. The boundary lines You have measured out for us have fallen in pleasant places; indeed, our inheritance is beautiful! For God is our inheritance and the portion of our cup. Bless my daily living. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.