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The Tribe of Joseph
26: 28-37

The tribe of Joseph DIG: What does the Second Census tell us about Manasseh's and Ephraim's historical roots? Why did the tribe of Manasseh increase so greatly from the First Census? Why did Ephraim decrease so much their forefather was blessed? Why would the wilderness generation want to know they had common historical roots from their parents, but a completely separate identity from them?

REFLECT: What meaningful group (tribe) are you a member of? How does being a part of that group help to support you and make you grow spiritually? How does being a part of that group enable you to help others? What can you do to make sure that the positive parts of your past are accentuated in your relationship with God? How can you make sure you will receive the blessing from ADONAI and not squander it?

Joseph is a fruitful vine near a spring, whose shoots climb over a wall.



1. The First Census in the past found **the tribe** of **Manasseh** being **numbered at 32,200** and **the tribe** of **Ephraim** being **numbered at 40,500** (**to see link click Ak – Numbering the Tribes**). The banner of **the tribe of Joseph** has wheat stalks on it, a reference to **Joseph's** dream and the rescue of the Egyptians, and the people of the world, from famine. On **his** deathbed, **Jacob** prophesied: **Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose shoots climb over a wall (Genesis 49:22)**. The well-watered, far spreading, **fruitful vine** is often used in the Bible to signify great productivity and fruitfulness **(Psalm 128:3; Ezekiel 19:10)**.[589] The word **fruitful** has the same root as the name **Ephraim**, which means *double fruit*. In the history of **Joseph's sons** are accounts of victorious leaders. **Joshua**, **Deborah** and **Samuel** all came from **the tribe** of **Ephraim**; while **Gideon** and **Jephthah** came from **the tribe of Manasseh**.[590] So **Joseph's** descendants would be strong and numerous. From the metaphor of **a fruitful vine**, **Jacob** changed the metaphor to a warlike figure beset by enemy **archers** who had tried to destroy **him** as a hated foe. **With bitterness, archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility (Genesis 49:23). This refers to the mistreatment that Joseph suffered first at the hands of his brothers** (see **Genesis Ix – Joseph Sold into Slavery by His Brothers**)**, and then from Potiphar's wife** (see **Genesis Ji – Potiphar's Wife said: Come to Bed with Me! But Joseph Ran**

Out of the House). **Their lying tongues seemed to be as sharp as arrows.**

Joseph knew that **his** bedridden **father** was old and ready to **die** when **he** was compelled to agree to bury **him** in **the** Promised **Land (47:28-31);** when news came that **his father** was **ill** and close to death, this came as no surprise. **So Yosef** responded by taking **his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him** as **Jacob's** life drew to a close **(48:1). Jacob** then adopted **his** two grandsons, intentionally blessing **Ephraim** over the firstborn **Manasseh** (see **Genesis Kx – Jacob Adopted Joseph's Two Sons Ephraim and Manasseh**).



2. The Second Census in the present: These were the descendants of Joseph, by their clans. The tribe of Joseph was one **tribe**, which was composed of two half-**tribes**, so **Moses** dealt with **them** separately. First, **the descendants of Manasseh were: of Makhir, the Makhirite clan (Makhir was the father of Gilead); through Gilead, the Gileadite clan. These are the six sub-clans of Gilead: through Iezer, the Iezrite clan; of Helek, the Helkite clan; through Asriel, the Asrielite clan; through Shechem, the Shechemite clan; through Shemida, the Shemidaite clan; and through Hepher, the Hepherite clan. Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons but five daughters; whose**

names were Machlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah. These were the clans of Manasseh; those numbered were 52,700 (26:28a-34), a tremendous increase of **20,500** from **the First Census** (see **Ai – The First Census: The Old Generation of Rebellion**), or sixty-three percent! The largest increase of any of **the tribes**.

To find the answer to this great increase, we must look to **the daughters of Zelophehad**. Because **Zelophehad** had no sons, **his** inheritance was supposed to be given to a male relative, a brother, uncle, or cousin. **This was not written in the Torah, but was merely a Jewish tradition**. However, **his** five courageous **daughters** stood up for **their father's name**. **They came forward and stood before Moses, Eleazar the high priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the Tabernacle and** said: **Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? They** did not ask for personal gain, but for what was right and fair for **their** family **name**. So **they** asked: **Give us property among our father's relatives (27:1-4). Moses** waited. The **ground under the girls** did not **split apart and swallow them** like **the households of Dathan and Abiram.** Nothing happened. No blasphemy was spoken. Being a wise man, **Moses** brought the case before **the LORD**, just as **he** had done with the problem of **the blasphemer (Lev 24:10-16)** and **the man** who had violated **the Sabbath (15:32-36)**. **And ADONAI said to him, "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and give their father's inheritance to them" (27:5-7). God** changed **the custom** because **it** was abusive to women. It was as if **God** was waiting for **them** to come forward.

YHVH continued: **Say to the people of Isra'el, "If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father's brothers. If his father had no brothers, the man's inheritance would be given to the nearest relative in his clan, so that he may possess it. This will be the standard for judgment to be used by the people of Isra'el, as ADONAI ordered Moshe" (27:8-11).** Regulations like this are unnecessary in today's society, but they were very important to **God's** ancient **people**. **The LORD** owned **the Land** and allowed **His people** to use it as long as

they obeyed **Him**. When **the Jews** turned to idols and polluted it, **God** allowed other nations to invade and steal their produce (see my commentary on the book of **Judges**). When **Isra'el's sins** became so wicked that **YHVH** could endure it no longer, **He** took **the Israelites** off **the Land** and exiled them to **Babylon** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gu – Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**). There, **they** learned to appreciate what **ADONAI** had given **them**.

The daughters of Zelophehad changed things for the better, but in essence **they** were a reflection of **the tribe of Manasseh** that was behind **them**. **Proverbs 31:26** says that **the virtuous woman opens her mouth with wisdom,** just like **the daughters of Zelophehad**. **ADONAI** not only did what was right and fair; **He** gave **them** far more than what **they** had asked for. **Manasseh's share** of **the** Promised **Land** was increased by **ten tracts of land,** in addition to **Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan, because the daughters of the tribe of Manasseh received an inheritance** along with **the sons. The land of Gilead belonged to the rest of the descendants of Manasseh (Joshua 17:5-6). Zelophehad's** name means *first born,* and thus, **he** would have been entitled to a double portion of inheritance; but instead, **his** five **daughters** each received a double portion resulting in the whole **tribe** of **Manasseh** being **blessed** with an additional **ten tracts of land west of the Jordan** (see map).[591]

Secondly, **these were the descendants of Ephraim, by their clans: of Shuthelah, the Shuthelahite clan; through Beker, the Bakerite clan; through Tahan, the Tahanite clan. This** was **one sub-clan of Shuthelah: through 'Eran, the 'Eranite clan. These were the clans of Ephraim; those numbered were 32,500 (26:28b** and **35-37),** a net decrease of **8,000** from **the First Census**, or twenty percent, the second largest decline after **Simeon's** whopping sixty-three percent. **The question then becomes, if Jacob chose to bless Ephraim, the younger brother, over Manasseh, the firstborn by the time Joshua was ready to assign the land for each tribe after Canaan was conquered, why was Manasseh's portion of land much larger the that of Ephraim?** Even though **Ephraim** had been **blessed** by **his** grandfather **Jacob**, and given the right of the first born and a double portion, the size of **the land** to be inherited was proportional to each **tribes**' spiritual condition. In this sense, **Ephraim** was so much like the believer today, if we walk with **God** we are **blessed**; however, if we walk in the flesh, our **blessing** decreases.

The huge size of **the Promised Land** is given in **Genesis 15:18** and **Deuteronomy 11:24**. **On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram**

and said: **To your descendants I give this land, from the River of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites (Genesis 15:18-21).** And **God** repeated this promise to **the wilderness generation** ready to enter **the Promised Land**. **Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea** if you obey **My** commands **(Deuteronomy 11:24).** But **sin** got in the way of **Ephraim** and worked against **their blessings**.

But during the conquest, **Ephraim sinned** by **failing to drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer**. **Joshua** recorded **that the Canaanites lived among the people of Ephraim, but became their slaves doing the heavy work (Joshua 16:10).** Like **King Sha'ul** later in **Isra'el's** history, who did not completely destroy **the Amalekites**, **the Ephraimites** did not completely destroy **the Canaanites**. This was against **God's** explicit command. And like **king Sha'ul**, who suffered the loss of **his** reign, **the tribe of Ephraim** suffered the reduction of the size of **their land** that might have been **theirs** if **they** had not **sinned**. As **Samuel** said to **king Sha'ul, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (First Samuel 15:22)**. **Therefore, Manasseh's obedience resulted in a 63 percent increase of their tribe, while Ephraim's disobedience resulted in a 20 percent decrease, which was reflected in the size of both their territories** (see map)**.**

The disobedience of **Ephraim** eventually resulted in the end of the monarchy. At the end of **king Solomon's** life, **Jeroboam**, from **the tribe of Ephraim**, led a revolt against **Solomon's son Rehoboam**, which resulted in the Kingdom being divided into **the northern kingdom of Isra'el** and **the southern kingdom of Judah** (see the commentary on **the Life of Solomon Cz – The Divided Kingdom**). **Jeroboam** immediately led **the** ten **northern tribes** astray when **he** established a new religion (see **the Life of Solomon Dd – Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel**). The **sin** of **Jeroboam** would infect nineteen kings of **Isra'el**, and produce only one godly king (see **the Life of Solomon Dn – The Kings of Isra'el**). **Their** downward spiral would continue until 722 BC when **the Assyrians** conquered **them**, intermarrying with **many** and taking **others** captive back to **Assyria (Second Kings 7:5-6)**. During the life of **the Master**, **the** ten northern **tribes** were called **Samaritans** and shunned by **the Jews** because **they** were half **Assyrian** and half **Jewish**. But **Yeshua** viewed **them** differently (see the

commentary of **The Life of Christ Ca – Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman**).

3. The Messianic Kingdom in the future: The lists of names and numbers are the material and tangible signs of **God's blessing, God's** faithfulness to past promises, and the surety of **God's** future promise keeping (see **Ae – Stars of Heaven, Grains of Sand, and the Promises of God**). In the **far eschatological future**, during the Messianic Kingdom, **Joseph** will continue to inherit a double portion of **the land (Ezeki'el 47:13)**, one being for **the tribe** of **Manasseh**, bordering **the territory of Naphtali from east to west (Ezeki'el 48:4)**, and the other being for **the tribe** of **Ephraim** bordering **the territory of Manasseh from east to west (Ezeki'el 48:5)**.

Jacob began **his** prophecy with **fruitfulness** when **he** said: **Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall (Genesis 49:22).** That is, **Joseph** is like **a fruitful tree planted by streams of living water** in **Psalm 1:3**, and of which **the shoots**, spring overtop **the wall** built round **the spring** for its protection. This **fruitfulness** of **Joseph** was shown by the vast number of **his descendants**. Therefore, **the blessing** of **Joseph** can be summed up in the word **fruitful**. There is nothing more glorious in life than **fruitfulness**. **Fruit** is the natural and necessary expression of the spiritual life, and the way in which our **Lord** emphasized it **(John 15:1-17)**, shows the importance of **fruitfulness** in the Gospel. The people who, like **Joseph**, are faithful to **ADONAI** will bring forth much good **fruit**, and their lives will be **filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Yeshua Messiah – to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:11).**[592]

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **Your** Awesome love, omnipotence and Almighty power! It is such a joy to bear **fruit** for **You**. **Your** love is so great and is always with me, guiding, caring and protecting me**.** What a comfort that **Messiah** dwells in me with the power of **Your Ruach Ha'Kodesh**. **I pray that from His glorious riches He would grant you to be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Ruach, so that Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to grasp with all the holy ones what is the width and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Messiah which surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled up with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 1:17-19).***

*Thanks so much for the wonderful blessing of being **adopted** as **Your child***

*(**Ephesians 1:5)**. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12). So that we, who were first to put our hope in Messiah, might be for His glorious praise (Ephesians 1:12).** It is fantastic that **You** sealed me with the promised **Spirit of God**, a guarantee of my future **home in heaven (John 14:1-3)**. **After you heard the message of truth – the Good News of your salvation – and when you put your trust in Him, you were sealed with the promised Ruach Ha'Kodesh . He is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of His possession – to His glorious praise (Ephesians 1:13-14)!***

*Being connected to **You**, my **vine**, is such a life changer. **I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me, you can do nothing (John 15:5).** It is only by being connected to **You**, living with **You** as my **Lord** and **Savior**, that **fruit** can be produced. It is a joy to live my life bearing **fruit** for **You**, my gracious and holy Heavenly **Father**! **But the fruit of the Ruach is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – against such things there is no law.** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*