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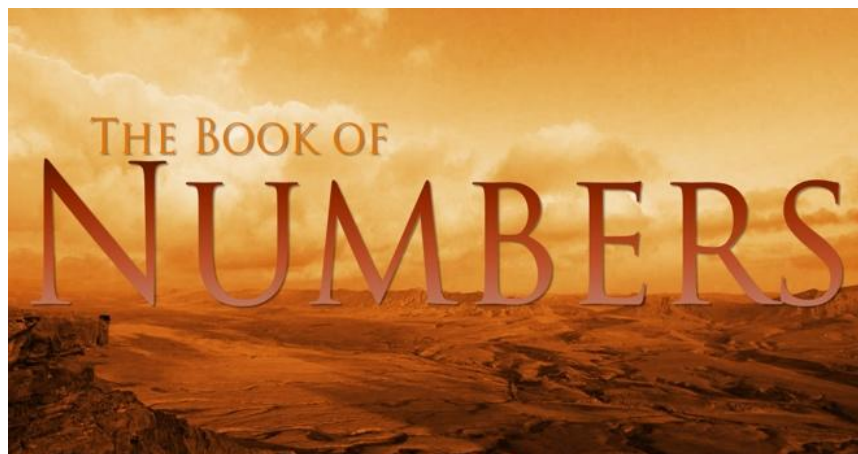
The Numbering of the Soldiers

26: 1-4

The numbering of the soldiers DIG: Compare this census with the first one found in Chapter 1. What is the reason for this Second Census? How were the land allocations decided? What tribe suffered a drastic decline in numbers? Why did that happen?

REFLECT: According to the record in Joshua, some of the tribes gladly accepted their inheritance and went to work making it home, some complained about the land they were given, and some went out and conquered more territory. What parallels can you draw between this and how believers might react to the situations God has put them in?

It was an entirely new generation of Israelites, who were encamped on the east bank of the Jordan River, ready for an attack on the land of Canaan.



Numbers 26:1a begins with a significant opening phrase: **After the plague . . .** which was the one recorded in **Numbers 25** that had put to death **those** who had participated in the worshiping of **the idols of Mo'ab** (to see link click [Ea](#) - **Taking a Stand for God: The idolatry of Israelite men**). While **the wilderness generation** was more faithful than **their parents**, **they** were no less **sinful**. Even before entering **the Promised Land**, **Moshe**

(under the influence of **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**), commanded: **When ADONAI your God hands it over to you, you are to strike all its males with the sword. Only the women, children, livestock and all that is in the city - all its spoil - may you take as plunder for yourself (Deuteronomy 20:13-14).** Which **they** did not do, and as a result, had countless problems for **the nation** for many years to come, culminating in the period of **the judges** where **Isra’el had no king and everyone did what they saw fit (Judges 21:25).**

ADONAI said to Moshe and the high priest Eleazar, the son of Aaron (26:1b). God’s command for **the First Census** (see [Ai - The First Census: The Old Generation of Rebellion](#)) was given to **Moses** and **Aaron**. Now following **Aaron’s** death (see [Df - The Death of Aaron](#)), **his** successor took **his** place. The aged **Moshe** would also die soon as well (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Gj - The Death of Moses](#)). This is the only place that **ADONAI** addresses **Eleazar** directly. Why **he** was needed for **the census** is not clear. **It is possible that the tribes of Jacob were counted by Eleazar, and Moses was merely to record the totals.**⁵⁷⁰

How sad it must have been for **Moses** to realize what might have been! Yet, there must have been enormous satisfaction to realize that it still might be . . . yet without **him**. This was a bittersweet time, one of ruing the past while still anticipating the future. It was the same task: number the able-bodied men **over the age of twenty** to muster **them** for the army of Isra’el. But, at the same time, it was a different task. The place had changed from **Sinai** to **Mo’ab**. The personnel had changed: **Moses** now assisted **his** nephew **Eleazar**. More importantly, **the people** had changed: **they were a new generation.**

Nearly forty years had transpired since **the First Census**, and now **the LORD** said: **Take a census of the entire assembly of the people of Isra’el twenty years old and over, by their ancestral clans, all who are subject to military service in Isra’el (26:2).** The instructions are identical to, but briefer than, the corresponding ones of **the First Census**. The sequence in the list of the twelve tribes is identical except for the minor reversal in the order of **Ephraim** and **Manasseh**. All **the men** over twenty in **the Exodus generation** had died; therefore, it was time for **the wilderness generation** to be **numbered** and mustered for the campaign of conquest that now awaited **them**.

Moshe and Eleazar the priest spoke with them on the plains of Mo’av by the Jorden across from Jericho, explaining, take a census of the people from twenty years old and over who came out of the land of Egypt, as ADONAI ordered Moshe and the people of Isra’el (26:3-4). These words actually serve as the section heading for **the tribe-by-tribe** list that follows. How impressive it is that the phrasing includes the

departure from **Egypt**. **The wilderness** generation were historically included with **their parents who came out of Egypt**. In other words, in a positive sense, **the wilderness generation** was given credit as being part of **the Exodus**. **They** were either under **the age of twenty** or not even born yet. But **God** wanted **them** to know that **they** were part of it all. In a sense, it seems as though the story begins anew, as though **the people** had just left the bondage in **Egypt**.⁵⁷¹

Opposed to **the First Census**, **the Second Census** is more interested in **the clans** and **families** rather than the founders of **the clans** (who were long dead), for **families** are the basis of society (see the commentary on [Ephesians Bu - The Necessary Foundation](#)). The list of **Jacob's sons** in **Genesis 46:6-26** forms the basis of this **clan** list, with the names of the sons transformed into **clan** names. The reason for adding **the clan** names of each tribe in **the Second Census** is to reinforce the sense that another new generation had been added to this **Second tribal Census**. Notice that all the figures in the book of **Numbers** are even numbers with the exception in **3:43** where there were **22,273 first born Israelite men over twenty** (see [As - The Census and the Redemption of the Firstborn](#)). Because **the census** was taken primarily for military purposes, it would naturally be arranged by **hundreds, fifties**, and so on. Since **the Levites** were not to have a physical inheritance in the land of Canaan itself (**18:20**), **they** are not included in **the census** with **the other twelve tribes**, but have **their own numbering** (see [Er - The Second Numbering of the Levites](#)).

It is interesting to compare the **numbers** counted in the two **census** lists in **Numbers 1** and **Numbers 26**. The total number for all twelve tribes decreases only slightly from **the First to Second Census** list: a total of **603,550** in **Numbers 1:46**, and a total of **601,730** in **Numbers 26:51**. The difference is less than two thousand people. **God** had faithfully brought the **little ones (14:3)** to the edge of **the Promised Land**, in spite of the fears of **the Exodus generation** that **their little ones** would only die **in the wilderness** or in the conquest of Canaan. One tribe among the twelve experienced a dramatic decrease in its numbers, **the tribe of Simeon**. There were **59,300 Simeonites** in **Numbers 1** and only **22,000** in **Numbers 26**. The dramatic act of faithlessness and disobedience of **Zimri the Simeonite** in **Numbers 25** probably reflected this decline, an example of **God visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and fourth generation (Numbers 14:18)**. The overall effect of the total numbers remaining relatively the same in spite of all the rebellions of the preceding generation and all the rigors of life in the wilderness is to affirm that **ADONAI** is **abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty (14:18)**.

Two important passages in **Numbers 26** guide the interpretation of this **Second Census**. First of all, **26:52-56** indicates that this second head count of all **the tribes** is primarily for the purpose of distributing fair amounts of land to **the tribes** based on **their** relative sizes. The larger **the tribe**, the larger will be **their** allotment of territory in Canaan. The location of **the land**, however, will be determined by lot. This **land** distribution function of **the Second Census** is a shift from the purpose of the previous **list** in **Numbers 1**, which focused on military preparation for war. The formula **all who are subject to military service in Isra'el**, which was repeated fourteen times in **the First Census** does not appear at all in **the Second Census**, except once here in **26:2**. **The census in Chapter 26** is no longer for estimating available military strength and the numbers of warriors as a means of gaining **the Land**. The goal of **the Second Census** is more to ensure that each tribe would receive its fair share of **God's** gift of **the Land** according to the needs of its particular population.⁵⁷²

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being so wonderful and loving! **You** have such a strong desire to love and to bless **Your people**. What blocks **You** from blessing **Your people** is **their** own sinful attachment to going **their** own way, and not following your way. **You** discipline out of love to bring **Your** selfish child back to **Yourself** so **You** can bless him. **Because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He accepts (Hebrews 12:6)**. Forty years of discipline seems long and harsh; but that generation had seen all **Your** mighty miracles that rescued them from Egypt. They could remember and retell the stories that they had seen that evidenced **Your** Almighty power and love. Knowledge of how great **You** are is one thing; but true love that is willing to follow and obey **You** in both the good and the hard times is another thing.*

*The selfishness of mankind is constantly ready to make a captive whenever life gets easy. Once in the land and ruled by judges, Seven cycles occurred in the book of **Judges** where **Isra'el** listened to their own sinful selfish ways, served other gods causing **God** in righteous anger and love to sell **Isra'el** into the hands of other nations (**Judges 3:8 Mesopotamia, 3:12 Eglon King of Moab, 4:2 Jabin king of Canaan, 6:1 Midian, 10:7 Philistines and Ammonites, 13:1 Philistines**). Their captivity was not because **Your** back was turned, but in open-eyed love **You** sought to bring them back to obedience to **Your** love so that **You** could bless **Isra'el**.*

*How much your heart must have rejoiced when **Isra'el** cried to you again in true sincerity by turning back to you in love. They did not just cry out to you for help with their voices; but their actions showed hearts of true repentance when they put away foreign gods and worshiped you. **Then Bnei-Yisrael said to ADONAI, "We have sinned. Do to us***

whatever seems good to You, but please, deliver us this day.” Then they removed the foreign gods from among them, and worshiped ADONAI. So His soul could not bear the misery of Israel (Judges 10:15-16). Then Your Spirit came upon Jephthah, by whom You rescued Isra’el from the hand of the Ammonites (Judges 11:33).

You are so worthy of all our worship! May Your people learn righteousness from Your discipline and not have to be disciplined again and again. May they lovingly follow You with all their heart. My soul longs for You at night, yes, my spirit within me seeks You. For when Your judgments are on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. Though grace is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness. Even in a land of uprightness he will act wrongly, not perceiving the majesty of ADONAI (Isaiah 26:9-10). It is a joy to worship and bow before you our majestic, wonderful and loving Heavenly Father! Thank You for seeking to purify Your people by trials (First Peter 1:7) and captivities, so Your people will come running back to Your love and You can bless them! In Your holy Name and power of resurrection. Amen