**The Second Census**

A Chinese proverb teaches that the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago and the next best time is today. I regret not having fruit trees at our farm that we have owned for about 20 years. We could be enjoying home grown apples now (or not, I did plant 4 apple trees about 15 years ago and it only took me 2 years to kill them). This same principle can be applied to saving money. If you have not saved in the past, the time to start is now. Accumulating savings will provide benefits in the future that will have long lasting effects on your life. In fact, all the decisions you make today will have impacts on your life for years to come. In our study of Numbers chapter 26, we see how the decisions the Israelites made during their time in the desert had long range implications for their nation.

The title of the chapter is The Second Census and as befits a book named Numbers, this chapter is almost entirely devoted to recording the adult male populations of the 12 tribes. This of course makes for some dry reading, not only due to the repetitive descriptions of the tribes but also naming the descendants of each tribe. The chapter begins with God instructing Moses and Eleazer to take a census of the men 20 years of age or older. This was the second census God had required, the first occurring nearly 40 years previously. What follows is a tribe by tribe list of the numbers of men counted along with listing clans by tribe. It is noteworthy that in the section devoted to the tribe of Reuben, reference is made to the infamous rebellion of Korah and his Reubenite followers. In the first chapter of Numbers we learned that the male population of Israel numbered 603,550 (not counting Levites). At the second census the population was down slightly totaling 601,730. Since God had vowed that none of the men 20 or older when the Israelites failed to go into Canaan years earlier, all the men counted in the second census were either born or came of age during the nearly 40 years of wandering in the desert. A close examination of the text reveals that some tribes gained population while other tribes lost population. Below is a chart comparing the second census to the first.

| **TRIBE** | **BEFORE** | **AFTER** | **CHANGE** | **PERCENT** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reuben** | 46,500 | 43,730 | -2,770 | -6% |
| **Simeon** | 59,300 | 22,200 | -37,100 | -63% |
| **Gad** | 45,650 | 40,500 | -5,150 | -11% |
| **Judah** | 74,600 | 76,500 | +1,900 | +3% |
| **Issachar** | 54,400 | 64,300 | +9,900 | +18% |
| **Zebulun** | 57,400 | 60,500 | +3,100 | +5% |
| **Manasseh** | 32,200 | 52,700 | +20,500 | +64% |
| **Ephraim** | 40,500 | 32,500 | -8,000 | -20% |
| **Benjamin** | 35,400 | 45,600 | +10,200 | +29% |
| **Dan** | 62,700 | 64,400 | +1,700 | +3% |
| **Asher** | 41,500 | 53,400 | +11,900 | +29% |
| **Naphtali** | 53,400 | 45,400 | -8,000 | -15% |
| **Levi** | Not counted | Not counted |   |   |
| **Total** | 603,550 | 601,730 | -1,820 | -0.3% |

What is most noticeable in the chart is the vast change in population of the tribes of Simeon (down 63%) and Manasseh (up 64%). Also note that the tribe of Ephraim, Joseph’s other son, was down 20%. Last week in our study of chapter 25, we read about a man from the tribe of Simeon who brought a Midianite woman into the camp. This may be an indication that the worship of Baal was more prevalent among the Simeonites and that they were over represented in the 24,000 killed by the plague God sent (see 25:9).

In verse 52 God tells Moses that the allocation of land in Canaan would be based on the second census. Larger groups would receive larger portions of the land while the smaller groups would receive smaller portions. This would prove to have long ranging effects on the tribal dynamics of the Israelites for generations. It would affect the type of land they inherited as well as the enemies they would have to fight. All of that was further complicated by the decision of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and one half of Manasseh to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River (see chapter 32).

This chapter illustrates the long term consequences of todays’ choices. In the case of the Simeonites, their birthright was traded away for temporary sexual pleasure just as Esau’s was traded away for a bowl of stew. Often the choices we make have to do with a desire for immediate gratification such as spending money today that can compound into a larger sum in the future. A small sacrifice today can yield a great harvest in the future. Some mistakenly regard the Christian life as a sacrifice not understanding what Jesus meant when he said that he came so that we would have a more abundant life (see John 10:10). Nevertheless, as our former pastor Tommy Richardson was fond of saying, the pay isn’t great but the benefits are out of this world.

t think I’ll try some fruit trees again.