

"The Faithfulness & Grace of God"

Numbers 26

As we initially observe Ch. 26, we see it's long and it's a list. Two immediate roadblocks that we often wrongly and too quickly conclude: it's boring and irrelevant. The Bible is never irrelevant. As I've said many times, if it's in the Bible, then according to 2 Tim. 3:16-17 it has to be useful for studying; it can rebuke our sinful tendencies; it just might correct wrong or misinformed thinking; and it will train us for righteous living that will equip us to serve God more or better. I get this all from 2 Tim. 3:16-17,

¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the [child] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Numbers 26 is one list, however, the reader needs to be aware of and compare this with the first census listed in Num. 1. And, if studying two lists makes you really excited, there's actually a 3rd list from Gen. 49 of the 12 sons of Jacob's descendants, which this follows as well.

What do we do with lists? We watch for the repeated patterns. We take note of unusual people or events mention-ed, digressions from the pattern or specific comments made about God, people or events. And of course, what's God telling us about Himself and us through the lists? The main point when comparing the list in Ch. 26 with Ch. 1 is

God is Faithful to His Word **(Num. 1; 26)**

We can pick this up from the very first verses:

After the plague the Lord said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, ² "Take a census of the whole Israelite community by families—all those twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army of Israel." ³ So on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them and said, ⁴ "Take a census of the men twenty years old or more, as the Lord commanded Moses." These were the Israelites who came out of Egypt:

God rescued the people of Israel from Egypt 40 years prior and promised them He would get them into and give them the land of Canaan. When they went into Egypt there were 70 Israelites. When they counted them in Ch. 1 there were over 600,000 men not including wives and children. A safe guesstimate would be 2 million descendants of Abraham. God promised Abraham He would bless him with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, give them the land and bless the world through them. God is faithful to His Word

To bless Abraham's descendants (vv.1-4; Num. 14:20-25)

Where are they? In Shittim on the plains of Moab across from Jericho. They are 10 miles from Jericho. How many people are there? The census is almost the same when we compare Ch. 1 and 26 [show chart]. 38 ½ years ago there were 603,550 men 20+ and over. Now there were 601,730. While that's a slight drop you have to remember they just lost 24,000 people (mostly men?) in Num. 25 and every counted man from Num. 1 is dead except Moses, Joshua and Caleb. Back in Num. 14 when that first generation disbelieved God could get them into Canaan, God said,

²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, ²² not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. ²⁴ But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. ²⁵ Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.”

Over 38 ½ years God has replaced almost all 600,000+ men. God is faithful to His covenant promise to Abraham. But He’s also faithful to His promise to

Judge when His warning is unheeded (vv.1, 8-10, 61, 64-65)

Throughout the chapter there are reminders of the consequences of not heeding God’s warnings. Right away we are reminded of the plague that just happened (v.1). If we recall it was Zimri, a prominent leader from the tribe of Simeon. Simeon’s numbers are the worst [show slide]. In the first census there were 59,300 Simeonite men, aged 20+, and now there were only 22,200. We also see that Gad’s numbers are down 6,150. Ephraim’s numbers were down by almost 8000 and Naphtali’s numbers are down by 8000. We aren’t given a reason why but I believe Simeon’s drastic reduction is a direct relation to their involvement with the Midianite women. There are other warning reminders.

In the first family’s census we have a digression in Reuben’s line where God reminds Israel of the rebellion of Dathan, Abiram and Korah. Reuben’s numbers were almost 3000 less, and the loss of Dathan and Abiram’s lines probably contributed to that. V. 10 clearly says,

¹⁰ The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men. And they served as a warning sign.

Another warning reminder is found in v.61 when Moses reminds the people what happened to Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s oldest sons, who should have been heading up the priesthood, but they died back in Lev. 10 when they offered up to God unauthorized fire. And then in v.35 another reminder about the deaths of those men 20+ who chose not to believe God would get them in the land. The warnings in the Bible are for our own good. There are always consequences to disobedience. And yet we also see here,

God mercifully extends grace (v.11, 19-21, 33)

When we are reminded of Korah’s rebellion and the deaths of Dathan, Abiram and Korah, we are told in v.11 that not all the sons of Korah died. Descendants from the sons of Korah would one day become singers and servants in the temple and some of them wrote some of the psalms in the Bible. God is gracious.

In Judah’s line God reminds them of Judah’s own sin of not allowing his 3rd son to marry Tamar (after his first two sons Er & Onan died because of wickedness [another warning, v.19]), so Tamar tricked Judah into sleeping with her and he himself becomes the father of Shelah and Perez. And it is through Perez line that Boaz comes from, who marries Ruth, who is the great-grandmother of David and ultimately the line through which Jesus comes.

The other sign of grace is found in v.33 where the five daughters of Zelophehad is unusually mentioned because we will hear about them in Ch. 27 when they approach Moses since dad had died and there were no sons and God extends shows grace by allowing his daughters to receive land as an inheritance also.

This is our God. A God who judges sin but also shows grace and mercy to His people. This is a good example of that bad old teaching that says the Old Testament is all about Law and judgement while the New Testament is all about love and grace. An extreme conclusion from that bad teaching is a few have said we don't need the Old Testament. "All Scripture is God-breathed" refers to the Old Testament, applying to all of it now. Please don't buy that lie. Please don't carry around a New Testament only as your Bible. The Bible is made up of 66 books, not 27.

The 2nd census shows us that God keeps His Word. In spite of over 600,000 men dying over 40 years, God has raised up another 600,000 plus. The sins of man can delay the plans of God but they cannot overthrow it. We also see here that

God Rewards Faithfulness **(26:52-56)**

After the census, God reminds Israel He will give them the land as their inheritance. This is part of the Abrahamic covenant. Israel's sins do not negate God's covenant promises. Disobedience results in lost blessings for some and delayed blessings for many but again, God keeps His Word and He will reward His people with the land. In vv.52-56 God tells them how the land will be divided among them.

⁵² The Lord said to Moses, ⁵³ "The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names. ⁵⁴ To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one; each is to receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed. ⁵⁵ Be sure that the land is distributed by lot. What each group inherits will be according to the names for its ancestral tribe. ⁵⁶ Each inheritance is to be distributed by lot among the larger and smaller groups."

The land is God's gift to His people but there's a reminder that, like all God's gifts,

They are according to His will (vv.52-54)

Logically God says the larger groups will need larger pieces of land while smaller groups receive smaller parcels of land. But He emphasizes that the land is to be divided by lot implying that God oversees the casting of the lot. When this actually happens in Josh. 18, we see this is the understanding that God oversees who receives what:

⁸ As the men started on their way to map out the land, Joshua instructed them, "Go and make a survey of the land and write a description of it. Then return to me, and I will cast lots for you here at Shiloh in the presence of the Lord." ⁹ So the men left and went through the land. They wrote its description on a scroll, town by town, in seven parts, and returned to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh. ¹⁰ Joshua then cast lots for them in Shiloh in the presence of the Lord, and there he distributed the land to the Israelites according to their tribal divisions.

Prov. 16:33 states

^{16:33} The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

While we may not cast lots today, the premise is that we have a sovereign God who oversees our lives. His promise to bless His people is based on His perspective not ours. This is why we must trust Him for what He allows into our life and what He does not. If everything we have and experience is under the sovereign will of God, then

We must thank Him more and grumble less (vv.55-56)

God knows we make wrong assessments about God and our life based on external circumstances. We need to be more thankful. The reason why God told them to cast the lot for the land was so that they wouldn't argue over it and choose the better parts of the land. The land of Israel was not all milk and honey then, nor is it now. The casting of the lots prevented the larger tribes from taking the better land from the smaller tribes. Listen to Josh, 17:14-18

¹⁴ The people of Joseph said to Joshua, "Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people and the Lord has blessed us abundantly."

¹⁵ "If you are so numerous," Joshua answered, "and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites."

¹⁶ The people of Joseph replied, "The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the plain have iron chariots, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel."

¹⁷ But Joshua said to the house of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—"You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment ¹⁸ but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have iron chariots and though they are strong, you can drive them out."

Joshua told the Manassehites & Ephraimites, you can have more land, but some of it is still occupied by Canaanites and some of it will take work to make productive. Even we are often more reactionary and impatient with God's ways. We speak before we think. We react instead of praying, planning and working. When we do that we grumble a lot. Joshua assured and encouraged Joseph's descendants, there is more land for you but you're not trusting God to enable you to see it by faith and receive it through hard work.

We forget that when "God gave them the land" they didn't just waltz in and start pitching tents; they had to serve God to receive the blessings He wanted to give them. And this is a point we often miss for Israel and apply to us today:

God Calls His People to Continue Serving Him
(26:1-2, 57-65)

What was the census for in Ch. 1? The same purpose; it still was here in Ch. 26.

Take a census of the whole Israelite community by families—all those twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army of Israel."

"Yes, I'll give you the land, God said, but you will have to fight your way with My help." The enemy does not give up ground very easily. Over 40 years God was slowly working; raising up new [hopefully faithful] soldiers to replace those who refused to trust God. How was He working? Slowly, almost unnoticed and then when He was ready, even after a plague cost them 24,000 people, God said let's count them again. Surprise, surprise ... God provides.

And what about the Levites? They're still needed. God needs people to serve Him in ministry and be where He needs them to be. Moses counts them and when compared with Ch. 1, God has increased the Levites by a 1000 servants.

Yes, Aaron and Miriam are gone. The original tribal leaders are all gone. Most of this new generation did not see the miracles in Egypt that their parents and grandparents saw. But just because they saw them didn't ensure they would walk by faith. Now this new generation would have to believe by faith that God saved them from the Egyptians through 10 amazing miracles. And now He has led them to less than 10 miles from the Jordan River. They are almost there. Will they choose to serve God by faith?

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 10:6

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Do we take seriously these warnings from Scripture that were written for believers? As I mentioned earlier about that bad teaching that there is no grace in the Old Testament, another bad teaching is it's opposite extreme: it's all grace for us in the New. God doesn't discipline His people anymore. As long as we're saved, that's all that matters. We don't have to take this too seriously. Jesus said true faith produces fruit. To produce spiritual fruit requires spiritual labour. When we read Hebrews 11 we read over and over again that Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and all these others "by faith" did something that showed they took their relationship with God seriously, believed that He was with them and they acted on that faith, doing hard tasks. What are we doing that shows we're acting and living by faith?

The end of Num. 26 reminds us that God still wants more people serving Him To believe by faith that 1) we are pleasing God by our obedience; and 2) that God will use our obedience to help unsaved people come to know God or His people to grow in God. Are we living by faith or are we so accustomed to living the Christian life we've lost the faith aspect? For example:

Do you read your bible most days? Why? We're supposed to. Sure, but why? Because we'll grow from it. Okay. Are you? Is your bible reading and studying changing your worldly selfish attitudes into more Christlike attitude? If you can't answer yes, I would suggest it's because you don't read the Bible by faith. That you have forgotten that you do it because you believe God is speaking to you and pointing out, you need to change here and here and here. Or you need to serve someone.

What about prayer? Do we pray by faith, believing that God really hears us and that He will answer those prayers, sometimes exactly how we ask them and other times in ways we never thought of?

Do we serve by faith? Do you/do I teach the Word of God actually believing God will use the things we say from His Word to help people grow in Christ? Do we sing and play music by faith believing that God is being praised and we're lifting up His people closer to God? Do we watch children in the nursery or junior church by faith, believing that freeing their moms and dads from watching their kids for half an hour will enable all of them to hear things God wants them to hear? Do

we go do our jobs tomorrow by faith believing that the excellence we put in work points people to the giftedness that God gives us and may give us opportunities to talk about Him?

God was giving Israel another chance to go by faith and do hard things believing that they will experience the promises in His Word in His time and way and to show a lost world who the only God is? I believe we're still called to do that today, to serve Him by faith.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message, please
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