

# FAMILY DIVISIONS



## Introduction

There are two pieces of information universally used across the world to identify people: full name and date of birth. With these details, people can start searching for additional information such as birth or death certificates, legal documents, and family history. However, in the absence of that information, there is another data source that can be just as (and potentially more) helpful: DNA.

In the late 1990s companies emerged to provide DNA testing directly to the average person to help with things such as paternity tests but they quickly learned people could discover a lot more about themselves and their families. It included ethnic makeup, migration patterns, and relatives they didn't know.

✚ **How much do you know about your family's origins?  
What would you like to know?**

## **Session Context**

The book of Numbers tells the story of the Israelites while in the wilderness for forty years. Since the scriptures reviewed in the last session, the Israelites have:

- made a failed attempt to take the Promised Land without God's approval
- received various laws to guide them during their extended wilderness stay
- rebelled against Moses and Aaron, resulting in dramatic judgment
- complained and disobeyed, bringing further plagues and discipline
- seen God provide leadership and confirm Aaron's priesthood
- witnessed the deaths of Miriam and Aaron
- experienced victories over hostile kings such as Sihon and Og
- set up camp near Moab
- intermingled with the Moabites who worshipped Baal of Peor, leading to Israelite men sleeping with Moabite women and engaging in idolatry

# Scripture Exploration

## Numbers 26:1-4

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<sup>1</sup>After the plague, the LORD spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go out to war in Israel." <sup>3</sup>Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, <sup>4</sup>"Take a census, from twenty years old and upward, as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel. These are those who came out of the land of Egypt."

## Numbers 26:52-56

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<sup>52</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>53</sup>"To these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. <sup>54</sup>To the more you shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer you shall give the less inheritance. To everyone according to those who were counted of him shall his inheritance be given. <sup>55</sup>Notwithstanding, the land shall be divided by lot. According to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. <sup>56</sup>According to the lot shall their inheritance be divided between the more and the fewer."

### VERSES 1-2

In Numbers 25, we find that the Israelites had committed idolatry by joining in pagan worship. God became angry and sent a plague that killed 24,000 people. The plague ended after Eleazar's son Phinehas acted with the jealousy of God (Numbers 25:11) and killed two of the idolaters who appeared publicly unashamed of their idolatry. Once the idolaters were gone, God called Moses to take a census.

### **VERSES 3-4**

The plains of Moab were Israel's final stopping place before entering the Promised Land. From this location, they probably could not see the full land promised but they could look toward the hills of the promised land and see it was close. At this point, God called Moses and Israel's new high priest, Eleazar, for a census of the people to start final preparations for taking the land. The Israelites were considered fully responsible for keeping the covenant when they turned twenty years old and at that age, men were counted for military service.

### **VERSES 52-54**

The census organized the Israelites by the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). The clans mentioned in Numbers 26:5-51 and 57-61 were primarily the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jacob. This organization reinforced their shared family heritage while also clarifying their distinct lineage. The result was clear guidelines for the families to understand what land they would receive once they entered the promised land.

### **VERSES 55-56**

While their size impacted how much of the promised land they received, God used lots to determine each tribe's location (see Joshua 14:1-5). Lots were a familiar practice for the Israelites by this time. The first record of God using it is found in Leviticus 16:7-10 on the Day of Atonement. While it can seem random, the Bible teaches us in Proverbs 16:33 that "[lots] every decision is from the LORD."

#### ☆ **Scripture Insight**

Numbers 26 lists a total of 65 clans but Jacob only had 12 sons. Most of the clans identified with a grandson of Jacob (he had 51). However, about 10 of them identified with great-grandsons (or later descendants). Manasseh, for example, had 1 son (Makir) but 8 clans because his one grandson

(Gilead) had 7 sons. Some of Gilead's line identified with him and others identified with his sons. This organizational structure demonstrates how the Israelites connected identity with family.

## Life Application

### + **Identities can shift with time and as families grow.**

The Israelites started as one man (Jacob) with 12 sons, born to him by two wives and two concubines. Within a few centuries, they had grown so numerous they identified more with the grandsons (and in some cases great-grandsons) of Jacob than the original sons. Organizing themselves by tribes and then clans made it easier to identify family history, but it also created distinct identities within the larger family.

As we age, our families typically grow to a point where we no longer identify by distant relative names. Eventually, we begin to identify with relatives closer to us in time and location.

### + **Divisions are necessary for sustained growth.**

Scholars estimate the Israelites had grown to 2 million people by the census in Numbers 26. They also estimate the plains of Moab were 30-50 square miles. That's 40,000 to 66,000 people per square mile. For comparison, New York City's Central park is 1.3 square miles and starts to feel crowded with 50,000 in it at the same time. To accommodate continued growth, the Promised Land had to be divided by tribe.

We too face times where our growth requires physical separation. Whether its children moving into their own place so they can start a family or churches adding a second location, physical growth needs physical space, and we must be ready to embrace the change.

**+ Size doesn't dictate value.**

God used two measures to divide the land: size and lots. The tribal size determined the amount of land while the lot determined the location (see Numbers 32 and Joshua 15-19 for more details). Though the size of land was different, each tribe's lot matched its purpose and nature. For example, the tribe of Benjamin was small but fierce and its land held significant strategic value, making it a good fit for those who would need to rise and defend Israel.

Families come in different shapes and sizes. God's blessings for some may look larger than others but it's how he positions us to use those blessings that's more important. Small or large, we should recognize we're valuable because we're a part of God's plan.

**+ Specific assignments call for specific provisions.**

All the tribes received a territory to inhabit except Levi. Instead of a single territory, they were given cities dispersed throughout the land so that every tribe had a group of Levites living within it. Their role was to provide spiritual leadership for the nation. In return, they lived off the tithes given (Numbers 18:21).

There are some families whose inheritance will look completely different than others. While it is a sign of their separation, it's also a sign of their responsibility. Not every family is equipped to take on that assignment or be held to that standard. The key is to respect our different assignments and honor our unique roles in God's kingdom.

## Session Reflection

- What growth are you seeing in your biological or spiritual families?
- What brings you joy or concern about that growth?
- How are you adapting to the growth?
- What changes do you anticipate in the next 1-2 years because of growth?
- How can you help retain your shared family identity despite the growth?

