

The Missing Simeonites

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We can learn from the book of Maccabees the identity of the Spartans. If you have seen the movie The 300 which depicts the Battle of Thermopylae in which 300 Spartans fight to the last man against the Persian “God-King” Xerxes and his army of more than one million soldiers. I liked the movie but I liked the truth much more. This week I include this story as told to us by Stephen M. Collins.

Brethren instead of wasting your time in the rituals of the lighting of the Channukiah, spend some quality time reading the books of Maccabees and then Josephus and see what you might learn. You may just lean the rest of the story that the bible mentions but never finished telling you about.

THE MISSING SIMEONITES By Steven M. Collins

This article is part of the co-operation that Steven Collins has given me in sharing these truths about the lost tribes of Israel. You can learn more from his site and buy the books he has for sale at <http://stevenmcollins.com/index.html>

In the book of Numbers, we find that the Israelites under Moses undertook a first and second census of the tribes of Israel while they were in the Wilderness. The results of those enumerations of the tribes of Israel reveal some surprising results. This column will attempt to at least partially explain what seems to be some incomprehensible results.

The first census is listed in Numbers Chapter One. In Numbers 1:1-3 and verse 18, we see that the census tallied the number of males “twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel.” Therefore, we should keep in mind that the entire population of Israel’s tribes in the Wilderness consisted of far more than the tally in Numbers 1. As a guideline, one would ordinarily double the numbers to allow for one wife per man of military age. Given the polygamous culture at that time, some of the men may have had a number of wives. It is difficult to make an estimate of the number of children, but we should keep in mind that large families were very common at that time. Numbers 1:46 records that 603, 550 adult males were numbered in the census. Based on some of the above rough methods of estimating the number of the entire nation of Israel at that time, we can see that the Israelites can be conservatively estimated to be body of approximately 3,000,000 people. For American readers, that number would equal the approximate population of Oregon. The actual number of

Israelites was likely higher as the tribe of Levi wasn't included in this census, nor were the people of the "mixed multitude" which accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 12:38).

Listed below are the populations of adult males per tribe, given in the order listed in Numbers 1.

TRIBE POPULATION

Reuben 46,500

Simeon 59,300

Gad 45,650

Judah 74,600

Issachar 54,400

Zebulon 57,400

Manasseh 32,200

Ephraim 40,500

Benjamin 35,400

Dan 62,700

Asher 41,500

Naphtali 53,400

Modern readers will notice that the tribe of Judah was, at that time, the largest tribe. The three smallest tribal figures are the three tribes which descended from Jacob and Rachel: Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin. However, when the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are totaled together, they numbered 72,700, showing the actual total of Israelites descended from Joseph constituted the second largest grouping in Israel. Notice that the tribe of Simeon was the third largest tribe in this census, taken approximately 1450 B.C.

Now, let's examine the census taken approximately 40 years later in 1410 B.C. (if the dates on the chapter headings in my book are accurate). For purposes of comparison, listed below are the totals from each census and the change in the total of adult males in each tribe. The second census is listed in Numbers 26. Numbers 26:2 confirms that it is the sum of males "twenty years old an upward...all that are able to go to war in Israel," so each census was conducted with the same criteria. TRIBE 1st Census 2nd Census Change

Reuben 46,500 43,700 -2,800

Simeon 59,300 22,200 -37,100

Gad 45,650 40,500 -5,100

Judah 74,600 76,500 +1,900

Issachar 54,400 64,300 +9,900

Zebulon 57,400 60,500 +3,100

Manasseh 32,200 52,700 +20,500

Ephraim 40,500 32,500 -8,000

Benjamin	35,400	45,600	+10,200
Dan	62,700	64,400	+1,700
Asher	41,500	53,400	+11,900
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	-8,000
TOTALS	603,550	601,730	-1,820

The national totals indicate the number of Israelites enumerated under Moses had dropped very slightly, but the tribal totals reveal something very different had transpired. The most evident change is that over half the tribe of Simeon inexplicably “disappeared” from the census totals. What happened? Simeon, the third largest tribe in Israel in the first census, had plummeted to be the smallest tribe of all in the second census! Another anomaly leaps out at the reader.

The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh shared the birthright blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, which included being blessed with large population growth. Manasseh had, indeed, risen dramatically in population, going from 32,200 to 52,700, a gain of 20,500 people, by far the largest increase in any tribe. However, its brother tribe which shared this birthright blessing, Ephraim, dropped 8,000 people to join Simeon at the bottom of the population totals of the tribes in Israel. Even the tribe of Benjamin outnumbered the Ephraimites at that time. Judah was still the largest tribe, but Manasseh’s explosive growth resulted in the tribe of Joseph being the largest tribe if Manasseh and Ephraim were added together. As many readers might observe, something “doesn’t add up” in these figures. As commentator Paul Harvey says here in America, let’s examine what happened to determine “the rest of the story.”

I believe the key to what happened in Numbers 26 is found in the previous chapter. In Numbers 25, we learn that Phineas, a Levite, executed “a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites” (verses 7-14). Phineas leaped to execute this Simeonite prince for his audacity in rebelling against God by taking a Midianite woman into his tent at a time when God was punishing Israel for such deeds. Indeed, God sent a plague among the Israelites which killed 24,000 people, and that plague was stayed by the action of Phineas.

The Bible does not record which tribes suffered the most from that plague. Even if one assumes the Simeonites bore the brunt of this plague, it does not begin to account for the drop in population of approximately 56,000 males of 20 years and older among the tribes which lost population between the two censuses. Also, Numbers 25:9 records that 24,000 people died in the plague, it does not state that all those slain were “males 20 years of age and older.” This indicates that 24,000 men, women and children of all ages died in the plague, and that perhaps 6,000 of that total were males 20 years and older. Where did the rest go?

It is my belief that after the execution by a Simeonite prince by a Levitical priest, there was a great dissension in the camp of Israel. We know from the accounts in the Torah of their wanderings in the Wilderness that the Israelites were very prone to revolting against Moses over various provocations. We know from Genesis 34:25 that Simeon and Levi were the two

most impulsive sons of Jacob, the two most likely to settle a matter “by the sword.” To put it in modern American terms, they were the kind who “shot first and asked questions later.” Genesis 49:5-7 prophesies that impulsive wrathfulness leading to violence would characterize both Simeonites and Levites through all the millennia up to and including the “latter days.”

In the episode of Phineas the Levite unilaterally executing a Simeonite priest, the two most violent tribes were likely at loggerhead, and a civil war among the tribes was not improbable. God usefully directed the Levites’ propensity to violence into becoming a tribe of butchers, killing, cutting up and sacrificing innumerable animals under the system of animal sacrifices established in ancient Israel. Simeon had no such outlet.

I believe a logical explanation for the sudden drop in several tribes’ population is that most of the tribe of Simeon and varying contingents of the other tribes literally “walked out” of the camp and left the main body of Israelites to strike out on their own. The huge drop in the number of Simeonites indicates that the Simeonites led this partial “exodus” from the Israelite camp. The Simeonites were impulsive and the execution of one of their chieftans (however just) could easily have provoked such an action.

The census figures indicate that the tribes of Ephraim and Naphtali contributed most of the remaining Israelites who accompanied most of the tribe of Simeon as it left the Israelite encampment. The census data indicates that the entire tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Issachar and Benjamin stayed with Moses as their second census totals reflect normal demographic growth.

Would God or Moses have allowed so large a mass of Israelite to leave the camp? I think the answer is yes. Indeed, they may have encouraged it as a way to end the dissension in the camp. There was no commandment of God that forbid any Israelites to leave the camp in the Wilderness, so the only penalty that exiting Israelites would bear would be that their children would not enter the Promised land with the children of those who stayed. Remember that every adult (except Caleb and Joshua) were under a death sentence in the Wilderness. For their rebellion, they would wander till the entire generation who refused to go into the Promised Land at first was dead! Under such circumstances, many could have thought: “If my choice is stay and die in this desert or leave and trust to my wits and sword to make a living, I’ll choose the second option.”

The tribe of Simeon, naturally impulsive, would likely have led such a mini-exodus. The fact that Manasseh grew greatly between the censuses and that Ephraim dropped dramatically argues that this can only be explained if a large number of Ephraimites left the camp. Both tribes were the birthright tribes, and they shared the same promises. If no one had left the camp, the population figures of Ephraim and Manasseh should have reflected the same growth.

If we limit our number of exiting Israelites to only those tribes who had net reductions in their tribal totals, we have about 50,000 males above age twenty and all their wives and children (perhaps 200,000 people). The tribes whose populations stayed static indicates that some of the natural growth of those tribes was deleted from the census because contingents of their tribes also joined the exodus. The total of those leaving the camp may have been larger than 200,000. If such an event occurred, there would have been a powerful stimulus to conduct the second census to “see who we have left.” Indeed, Numbers 26:1-2 shows that right after the events described above, God told Moses to take a census of all the tribes.

Where did the departing Israelite go? There are three groups of people exhibiting Israelite characteristics which surfaced in the world outside of the Promised Land. One group was the Sea Peoples who raided and settled throughout the Mediterranean World while most of Israel lived in Israel during the time of the book of Judges. Both Yair Davidy and I have commented in our books about the Israelite nature of some of the identifiable tribes in the Sea Peoples. However, it could be also noted that some of the Sea Peoples were Israelites who sailed from the promised Land to seek new homelands as colonists or to escape the various invasions of oppressors which are enumerated in the book of Judges.

There is a second group, famous in the ancient world, which exhibited the traits of the tribe of Simeon and which acknowledged a tribal tie to the Israelites. That group was the Spartans of ancient Greece. The Spartans were known to be descended from a people non-native to Greece who arrived there in ancient times. The Spartans were famous as being the most martial of the Greek city-states. It was the Spartan King Leonidas with 300 elite bodyguards who held back the army of the Persian Empire at the battle of Thermopylae. They had a rigorous, martial community which was very different from the rest of the Greek city-states. The tribe of Simeon would be expected to “live by the sword” and be a martial community wherever they settled. However, there is more evidence than that.

The Book, Sparta, by A.H.M. Jones, a Professor of Ancient History at Cambridge University, noted several things about Sparta. He states the Spartans worshipped a “great law-giver” who had given them their laws in the “dim past” (page 5 of his book). This law-giver may have been Moses.

Professor Jones also noted the Spartans celebrated “the new moons” and the “seventh day” of the week” (page 13). Observing new moons was an Israelite calendar custom, and their observance of “a seventh day” could originate with the Sabbath celebration. Prof. Jones also notes, as do other authorities, that the Spartans were known for being “ruthless” in war and times of crisis. This sounds exactly like the Simeonite nature, which was given to impulsive cruelty, as the Bible confirms.

Interestingly, Prof. Jones writes that the Spartans were themselves divided into several “tribes” which constituted distinct military formations within the Spartan army (pages 31-32). If the

Spartans were descended from Simeonites and several other Israelite tribes who left the rest of their tribesmen just prior to the census of Numbers 26, it would make sense that they would be allied together as distinct tribes even in a new homeland like Sparta. The Spartans also founded a colony in Italy called "Tara" (pages 11 and 33). The name "Terah" is a Semitic/Israelite name as Terah was the father of Abraham (Genesis 11).

Also, I make the case in my book, *The "Lost" Ten Tribes of Israel...Found!*, that Carthage was founded by Semites from Israel, Tyre and Sidon who continued the Semitic/Hebrew language of the Israelites as well as the Baal worship that Israel, Tyre and Sidon shared. Carthage and the Greeks were historically enemies, but Sparta exhibited a community of interest with Carthage. When Carthage's army was not fighting well against the Roman legions, it was a Spartan named Xanthippus who traveled to Carthage to reorganize and drill the Carthaginian army to fight Rome. Who better than a Spartan to teach military tactics? This event is recorded on page 14 of a book, *Hannibal's War With Rome*, by Terrence Wise and Mark Healy.

I have saved the greatest proof to the last, however. The Spartans themselves declared that they were a fellow tribe of the Jews and corresponded with an ancient Jewish High Priest about their relationship. The book of I Maccabees 14:16-23 records this correspondence, which includes this statement:

"And this is the copy of the letter which the Spartans sent:
The Chief magistrates and the city of the Spartans send greeting to Simon, the chief priest, and to the elders and the priests and the rest of the Jewish people, our kinsmen."
(Emphasis added.)

Notice the Spartans called the Jews "our kinsmen." The Spartans did not proclaim themselves to be Jews, but rather that they were "kinsmen" to the Jews (i.e. members of one of the other tribes of Israel). That the Spartans acknowledged a common ancestry with the Jews of the tribe of Judah gives powerful weight to the assertion that they were Israelites who migrated to Greece instead of the Promised Land. The Spartan culture is most like that of the tribe of Simeon, most of which apparently left the Israelite encampment in the Wilderness after a Simeon prince was executed by a Levite.

There is a third group of wanderers in ancient history which manifested a Simeonite/Israelite ancestry, but this column is now long enough. The story of another band of Simeonites who struck out on their own in the world will be told in a future column.

Shalom and Greetings to all,

Steve Collins

I Maccabees 12: 5 This is a copy of the letter that Jonathan wrote to the Spartans: 6 “Jonathan the high priest, the senate of the nation, the priests, and the rest of the Jewish people send greetings to their brothers the Spartans. 7 1 Long ago a letter was sent to the high priest Onias from Arius, who then reigned over you, stating that you are our brothers, as the attached copy shows. [1 [7] Onias: Onias I, high priest from 323-300 or 290 B.C. Arius: Arius I, king from 309 to 265 B.C. The letter was sent long ago, i.e., a century and a half before.]8 Onias welcomed the envoy with honor and received the letter, which clearly referred to alliance and friendship. 9 2 Though we have no need of these things, since we have for our encouragement the sacred books that are in our possession, [2 [9] The sacred books . . . in our possession: a reference to “the law, the prophets and other books,” as mentioned in the Prologue to Sirach (1 Macc 12:1), after 132 B.C.]

10 we have ventured to send word to you for the renewal of brotherhood and friendship, so as not to become strangers to you altogether; a long time has passed since your mission to us. 11 We, on our part, have never ceased to remember you in the sacrifices and prayers that we offer on our feasts and other appropriate days, as it is right and proper to remember brothers. 12 We likewise rejoice in your renown. 13 But many hardships and wars have beset us, and the kings around us have attacked us. 14 We did not wish to be troublesome to you and to the rest of our allies and friends in these wars; 15 with the help of Heaven for our support, we have been saved from our enemies, and they have been humbled. 16 So we have chosen Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason, and we have sent them to the Romans to renew our former friendship and alliance with them. 17 We have also ordered them to come to you and greet you, and to deliver to you our letter about the renewal of our brotherhood. 18 Therefore kindly send us an answer on this matter.”

19 This is a copy of the letter that was sent to Onias: 20 “Arius, king of the Spartans, sends greetings to Onias the high priest. 21 A document has been found stating that the Spartans and the Jews are brothers; both nations descended from Abraham. 22 Now that we have learned this, kindly write to us about your welfare. 23 We, on our part, are informing you that your cattle and your possessions are ours, and ours are yours. We have, therefore, given orders that you should be told of this.”

I Maccabees 14: 16 3 When people heard in Rome and even in Sparta that Jonathan had died, they were deeply grieved. [3 [16] The embassy to Rome and Sparta was sent soon after Simon’s accession to power, and the replies were received before Demetrius’ expedition (1 Macc 14:1-3)—probably in 142 B.C.]17 But when the Romans heard that his brother Simon had been made high priest in his place and was master of the country and the cities, 18 they sent him inscribed tablets of bronze to renew with him the friendship and alliance that they had established with his brothers Judas and Jonathan. 19 These were read before the assembly in Jerusalem.

20 This is a copy of the letter that the Spartans sent: “The rulers and the citizens of Sparta send greetings to Simon the high priest, the elders, the priests, and the rest of the Jewish people, our brothers. 21 The envoys you sent to our people have informed us of your glory and fame, and we were happy that they came. 22 In accordance with what they said we have recorded the following in the public decrees: Since Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason, envoys of the Jews, have come to us to renew their friendship with us, 23 the people have voted to receive the men with honor, and to deposit a copy of their words in the public archives, so that the people of Sparta may have a record of them. A copy of this decree has been made for Simon the high priest.”