

February 8 : Scriptures Numbers 10-13

SUMMARY

Well, the camp of Israel, about 1.5 million strong with animals and supplies, is about ready to set out on their journey. Again, remove the chapter number and heading and you can see how it segues from the cloud calling the shots as to the Israelites moving and resting and the instruments used to help coordinate their departures and arrivals. Chapter 10 introduces the two silver trumpets for signaling. The signals include calling either the leaders or the whole community to gather at the tent of meeting, or when each tribe sets out for the journey (coordinated with the cloud's movements, 10:2), or to give signals in battle (10:9) or for the sacrificial service and feast days. The Sabbath is one of those feast days, so the Sabbath's start and its conclusion are announced with the silver trumpets.

There is archeological proof that the trumpets were used in Jesus' day. When researchers were examining the ruins around the Temple Mount, they found a stone that appeared to be the upper edge of a wall section. It's a very special stone that was pushed down from the Temple during the Temple's destruction in the year A.D. 70. Inscribed on the stone are the Hebrew words, "To the house of trumpeting to distinguish" or an alternate reading could be, "To the house of trumpeting to announce." There is strong evidence that this was from a high vantage point on the top of Herod's Temple Mount Wall, designating the place where a trumpeter would sound his horn, notifying shopkeepers to close shop just before the Sabbath started. Today in Israel, a "Sabbath Siren" is sounded 40 minutes before the Sabbath begins to give everyone enough time to complete their business and enter the Sabbath on a peaceful note. It's quite moving to hear the siren and then listen as Jerusalem's noise diminishes to a whisper and a holy hush falls over the entire city. It's an awesome experience!

And now we commence the journey through the wilderness. On the 20th day of the 2nd month of the 2nd year, the cloud stirs and the first move starts. The Lord gives the Israelites His "tribe and Tabernacle crew" marching order. From front to back the line was thus: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, the Gershonites (the Tabernacle "software"), the Merarites (the Tabernacle "hardware"), Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, the Kohathites (the Tabernacle's Holy Furnishings), Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, and as the rear-guard Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. As the people set out, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, is set to depart for his home in Midian, but Moses appeals to him to go along with the Israelites. While the text here doesn't say Jethro accepted, in another place, it says he did, but he is known in that verse as "the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law" (Judges 1:16).

The first move is a three-day journey. As they move out Moses cries out for Yehovah to advance before them and remove any enemies, and when they rest, may the Lord rest among them. In this, you can see Moses' concern about the Lord's presence (the cloud) remaining with them from Exodus 33:15.

In chapter 11, the trouble starts! As we all know, complaining seems to be a universal talent with people. It's the story of our lives. *Complain, complain, complain.* The peoples' complaint is fueled because of their perceived "hardship." Hardship? What hardship? Everything they needed was provided to them! Watch how it spreads.

The first incident starts with the people on the edge of the camp. How do we know that? The Lord's disciplinary fire breaks out and consumes the outskirts of the camp (11:1). This is the fire of the Lord's displeasure. I see it as a warning shot to the complainers and a lesson to the rest of the nation. Since we're looking at the book of Numbers as a lesson book for our lives, does the Lord sometimes warn us when we start getting out of hand? I've often received His warning through mature fellow believers, His word, and the Holy Spirit prompting thoughts, impressions, or feelings in me. Learning to heed God's warning is often a learning curve birthed by experience! As for the complainers, they cried to Moses, Moses cried to God, and the fire abated. But did the complaining stop? No.

Now the complaining spreads farther into the camp. I want you to notice just who is doing the complaining. It's the "mixed multitude." It's not just God's people, but it's the hangers-on, the non-Israelites, those who aren't God's people per se and don't seem so committed to Him, although they're in His camp and under His command. What's obvious about their complaint is that it's driven by their craving, not their need (11:4), Therefore, *it's their challenge to God about His provision.* Here are some questions to consider. How common is it to want the predictable "Egypt" over the unpredictable "Wilderness" with God? Has the Lord ever taken you into a Wilderness, a place of deprivation where only He can provide, to teach you to rely on Him in peace? Have you failed to recognize this "wilderness experience" and complained, only to be disciplined? Were they actually saying that they would willingly trade their "bondage" to God for bondage in Egypt? Is our perceived freedom ever free? Are they bristling that their food now cost them obedience to God, and they didn't really like the trade-off? Food for thought and discussion (yes, pun intended).

The outward complaint is about the manna and the lack of variety they had enjoyed in their "luxurious" Egyptian slavery. But the real issue is their *lack of trust* in God. Talk about a skewed perception during difficulties! If you want to get a kick out of this

situation, search for Keith Green's song, "So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt?" on youtube.com or other social media music sites. It's a hoot. But getting back to the variety issue, not only was manna delivered to their doorsteps every day, it could be prepared in numerous ways (11:8) as Keith Green points out in his song. As a basic food, manna is described as tasting "like a pastry cooked with the finest oil." What? *Eating doughnuts every day? Yes, please!*

And now the people are complaining, the Lord is furious, and Moses is getting crabby. Everyone's in a bad way! At least Moses goes to the source to vent his frustration unlike the multitude of petulant little cry-babies he's annoyed with. I love Moses' response, "If you are going to treat me like this, please kill me right now if I have found favor with you, and don't let me see my misery anymore." Now that's an honest prayer! Rightfully, Moses places the responsibility on the proper shoulders – God's. And the Lord responds graciously by equipping leaders with the Holy Spirit to help the beleaguered Moses. There's an interesting tidbit here that can easily be overlooked. When Joshua complains that two of the leaders aren't following what he perceives as "protocol," Moses' response is this, "If only all the Lord's people were prophets, and the Lord would place his Spirit on them!" Come to think of it, the people of Israel did have the choice to listen to God but refused. They pushed Moses forward to listen and relay to them what God said. What a lost opportunity! What would have happened if the people prayed for God to speak to them and He poured out His Spirit on all? The story of Israel's Wilderness experience would have turned out a whole lot different.

Going on, Yehovah also promises to satisfy the peoples' craving, but it will cost them. "Oh, you'll get what you crave. I'll provide you with all you crave *and more!* You'll stuff yourself so full it'll come out your noses and mouths." Then when they have the food in their mouths, before they get to swallow a bite, God strikes the complainers with a plague. They got what they craved, but it cost them their lives. Why? Because they looked back to Egypt and scorned the Lord. A perfect illustration of that is a child who wants to smoke and the parent letting them have, nay "giving" them, cigarettes and making them smoke until they become sick. Will God sometimes allow us to so indulge our cravings and lusts that we become sick, are harmed, or possibly die? Now, there's a good discussion point.

Oh, but the complaining and rebellion don't stop in chapter 11. In chapter 12, the beat goes on. Now the complaining spreads from the outskirts to the mixed multitudes in the camp and now to the leadership, Aaron and Miriam. At first, God's provision was challenged. Now God's leadership and His choice of leader are challenged.

The "issue" is focused on Moses' "Cushite" (Ethiopian) wife (12:1). We know Moses was married to Zipporah, a Midianite. But that isn't close to being Ethiopian. The debate goes on. What's more important is the "issue" isn't really the issue. The real issue is "Does the Lord speak only through Moses? Does he not also speak through us?" (12:2). In other words, it's a sibling rivalry. They found "fault" with Moses and used it as an occasion to challenge his authority, calling, and boost their selves. "Miriam," by the way, is related to the root, *mara*, which means "bitter." Remember what I said about names reflecting the person or how they function?

What is Moses' response? Nothing. Moses is the humblest person on earth and yet he could exercise divine power when required to do so. One definition of humility is "strength under control." And while Moses puts up with the attack, "the Lord heard it." Oops! Yehovah steps in to defend His trusted servant. Since the topic is who hears God, the Lord rebukes Aaron and Miriam by telling them that even the best prophet sees in part (dreams), but Moses sees clearly (awake). That's a big difference! And then the Lord levels the punishment. Miriam is struck with leprosy. It's a very fitting punishment for her. Aaron doesn't get leprosy because that would have disqualified him from his uber-important role in the sacrificial service. But Miriam is made the example. The one who claimed enough closeness to God to hear Him is pushed away from Him by the *outward manifestation (the skin disease) of her inward sin*. Those afflicted with this disease could be regarded as a corpse. Perhaps we should regard people who spread evil speech as "dead to us" until they repent and change their ways? God will heal her, but only after she sits for a week and thinks about what she did.

This is reaching a critical point. God cannot allow such rebellion to spread. So far, He's addressed it by fire, by plagues, and now through leprosy. The urge to rebel against God, now manifested by rebellion against His representative, must stop!

In chapter 13 we reach the event that caused Israel to wander in the Wilderness for a total of 40 years. God sends in 12 men to scout the land from north to south. What's their report? "Hey, it's a great land. Look at the enormous way it produces! It's everything we were promised. But..." (here it comes) 10 of the scouts said, "The people are strong, their defenses are insurmountable, real giants are there, and our enemies are spread out all over." Joshua, Moses' aide, and his buddy, Caleb, strongly disagree. "We can do it! We'll eat those giants for breakfast." The 10 scouts reply, "No, we can't. We're doomed. We might as well stay in the wilderness. In our eyes, we're like ants compared to them, and we assume they see us the same way!"

And with that, we'll leave it as a cliff-hanger for tomorrow's Cruisin' Through The Bible chapter.

With the manna complaint, it was a case of a lack of trust in God's provision. Then it was a lack of trust in God's leadership. Now the people are on the cusp of their greatest mistake. The people are about to outright *refuse to trust* God. This will be a fatal error for an entire generation while everyone else gets enrolled in a 40-year training program to learn how to trust God. Why? Because Yehovah has promised to provide and protect them with His presence. When they reach their Promised Land, they'll need to trust Him continually despite what their eyes tell them. Trust God and obey "for there's no other way." As we've seen and will see more of, lack of trust is a springboard to rebellion. It's the "I don't trust you, 'Lord', so I'm going to do it MY way" attitude.

See? The book of Numbers (Bamidbar) does pertain to our lives as Christians. Learning to trust God is our foundational lesson and constant guide for life. Fail that and you're in deep trouble.

INSIGHT

Moses declared, "If only all the Lord's people were prophets and the Lord would place his Spirit on them!" This happened to God's people. It just took about 1,470 years to start and hasn't been fully realized yet. On Shavuot/Pentecost, the 50th day after Jesus' resurrection and 10 days after His ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured out as Jesus promised and He filled all those who had faith in God's plan, salvation through Jesus alone. Peter declared that this was what the prophet Joel had prophesied, "After this *I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. I will even pour out my Spirit on the male and female slaves in those days*" (Joel 2:28-29). Yes, the Lord poured out His Holy Spirit on His people, but not all people on earth are filled with His Spirit. There has been no "all flesh" outpouring yet. That will come at Jesus' return. But that doesn't mean the promise hasn't arrived. It just means that we now understand *the promise is in process*. There will come a day when Moses' cry will be answered remarkably!

February 9 : Scriptures Numbers 14-16

SUMMARY

Oh, the wailing! Chapter 14 opens with the Israelites' reaction to their well-deserved punishment from the Lord and the brutal spanking by the Canaanites. But did they learn their lesson? Oh, no. This followed, "All the Israelites complained about Moses and Aaron" (14:2). *Again, with the complaining!* But now it intensifies into open, community-wide rebellion, "And the whole community told them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to die by the sword? Our wives and children will become plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let's appoint a leader and go back to Egypt.'" Not a good move, people!

At this point, all control is out of Moses' and Aaron's hands. Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes in grief and desperately call to the people to trust God and not rebel against Him.

Too late. "While the whole community threatened to stone them, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the Israelites at the tent of meeting" (14:10).

The Lord issues the same threat in Numbers 14:12 as in Exodus 32:10 after the Golden Calf debacle. Moses again intercedes for the people, "Lord, Your reputation is at stake. If you destroy these people, what will the Egyptians say? What will the Canaanite hear from them about You?" As before, Moses calls on the Lord to act based on His character He revealed to Moses at the Grand Revelation of God's Glory (Exodus 35:6-7). Thankfully, the Lord graciously pardons the Israelites, *but* this whole situation has come to the point where no matter what Yehovah has done, no matter how spectacular the manifestation of His glory is, and despite His very physical presence is with them, there is nothing that will convince the generation of the refuse-to-trust Israelites to faithfully follow Him. That spiritual cancer must be removed from the community. They don't have the trust in God needed to follow Him boldly against the Canaanite forces. That is, of course, except Caleb. He's got faith in the Lord but will have to suffer the same fate as the whole generation of Israelites. However, God is going to bless him greatly afterward.

As a result of the community's complaining, the Lord is going to give them exactly what they feared. The entire generation of complainers, the 20-years-old and up, will die in the wilderness. Only Joshua, Caleb, and those under 20 will survive to enter the Promised Land. Sadly, it will take another 39 years to flush out the unbelief, just like it will take covenant punishments and a generational exile in Babylon to flush out future idolatry from the Israelite nation about 850 years later. Sadly, the Israelite children will also suffer

for the sins of their fathers for they will have to endure the wilderness life as shepherds rather than enjoy the wonderful fruits of the Land (14:33). As a punishment for bringing a bad report, turning the community against Him, and smearing His name, Yehovah smites the 10 naysaying scouts.

Check this out. When faced with the prospect of “homelessness” in the desert for an entire generation, the people suddenly find faith *in themselves* to launch an attack. Moses warns them the Lord isn't with them and they'll get routed, even killed, in a futile effort to take the land by themselves. When I read this, I think of the clip from *The Princess Bride* where Billy Crystal as Miracle Max and Carol Kane as his wife Valerie send off the intrepid Wesley and team to rescue Princess Buttercup. I can hear the Lord and Moses saying the same words.

Moses: (shouting) “Bye, bye, boys!”

God: (shouting) “Have fun stormin' the castle!”

Moses: (under his breath) “Think it'll work?”

God: (under His breath to Moses) “It would take a miracle.”

God and Moses: (shouting) “Bye!”

And just like God and Moses warned them, the attacking Israelites get the tar beat out of them and they're chased out into the desert.

Chapter 15 takes a turn from the rebellion narrative to give further instructions regarding offerings. Why would the Lord interrupt the account of the rebellion to issue more laws regarding sacrifices? The key is in the phrase, “Speak to the Israelites and tell them: *When you enter the land I am giving you to settle in*” (15:2). This is a new law that will take effect once Israel comes into the Land... *in 39 years!* In this, the Sages see a promise to the younger generation that He will indeed bring them into the Land. After all, why would God give a law that His people are unable to fulfill?

The new part is the offerings are to include a libation offering, i.e., wine. This is poured into a bowl that is built into one of the four horns on the corner of the Altar.

The section moves from offerings the Israelites must make when they enter their new homeland to offerings for unintentional sins and sacrifices required to make things right with the Lord. The instructions then move to an admonition against “the person who acts defiantly, whether native or resident alien, blasphemes the Lord. That person is to be cut off from his people. He will certainly be cut off because he has despised the Lord's word and broken his command; his guilt remains on him” (15:30-31). And what is the very next

paragraph about? A man gathering wood on the Sabbath day! Now think about this. Did the man not know he was forbidden to gather wood on the Sabbath? Why gather wood? Primarily to cook. But lighting fires (cooking) was specifically prohibited on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3). Even if the man had no intention of lighting a fire, gathering wood was still considered domestic work and thus a violation of the Sabbath. This is an act of open defiance because Israel has been living God's Torah and observing the Sabbath prohibition for nearly a year. Therefore, the community stones the man to death per the Torah. And why the whole community? The teaching here is linked to what has been happening in the storyline. One sin can not only impact the whole community, it can spread to the entire community and create a total mess like the one we've just read. This account is another warning to the Israelites about being defiant. As God is trying to shape His covenant people into a trusting community that lives in a distinct, godly way (as opposed to the pagans they left in Egypt and will eventually confront in Canaan), strong measures must be enforced to show that learning trust and obedience are crucial!

The final section of this chapter is about putting tassels on their garments. Now, what is that about? Simple. "These will serve as tassels *for you to look at, so that you may remember all the Lord's commands and obey them* and not prostitute yourselves by following your own heart and your own eyes. This way you will remember and obey all my commands and be holy to your God" (15:39-40). The tassels are like little fringes just on the corners of their garments on the bottom edge. They're marked with a blue thread because blue was often associated with God and His domain. Remember when the elders joined Moses on Mount Sinai for their covenant meal back in Exodus. What did the "floor" look like under the Lord's throne? "They saw the God of Israel. Beneath his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli (a deep blue), as clear as the sky itself" (Exodus 24:10). Not only are the Israelites expected to know and "walk" God's way, but the Lord graciously gives them a reminder near their feet. Today, many Jews wear the fringes (called *tzit-tzit*) to remind them of the Torah and their obligation to obey the Lord's commands. Sadly, the next chapter shows the obedience thing is still a problem.

In chapter 16 we come to the apex of Israel's wilderness rebellion. Long story short, Reubenite tribal leaders led by Moses' and Aaron's Levite cousin, Korah, stage a coup against God's two designated leaders. The issue springs from the community's failure to take the land and their banishment to the wilderness. Obviously, it's not their fault, right? It's Moses' failure as a leader. Sure. In truth, there is a deeper issue going on, and it takes a bit of explaining so stay with me.

Remember when Jacob's firstborn son, Reuben, slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22)? What Reuben did was an attempt to secure his position as firstborn by "pre-

claiming" or assuming his inheritance, the concubine. Reuben's punishment fit his crime. Jacob demoted Reuben from his firstborn status. To designate a new "firstborn" successor, Jacob didn't select the next two in Leah's line, Simeon and Levi, because of their anger and all too eager attack to exact justice in the Shechem affair (Genesis 34). Therefore, the next in line was Judah. He and his family line would become the leaders of the whole Israelite family (Genesis 49:8-10). Interestingly, that same anger and sense of justice worked for the Levites in the Golden Calf incident. Their willingness to strike down their compatriots and to stand with God for His honor earned them the priesthood.

So, thinking back, do you think Reuben was a little miffed about his demotion and prophesied subservience to Judah? Do you think Reuben's offense against Judah may have been passed down to his descendants against the Judahites, Judah's family line?

Now let's look at this Korah fellow. Who was he? Korah was a grandson of Levi just as Moses and Aaron were. Aaron was a firstborn in the Kohath family line and Korah himself was a firstborn of another branch of the same Kohath family (Exodus 6:21). In other words, Aaron and Korah were cousins. Now, remember that the Lord elevated Aaron to the High Priesthood and the rest of the Kohath family line were assigned to assist Aaron and his sons. When you read what Korah says and does, it's clear he's making a play for the "top position" of High Priest because he sees himself just as qualified as his cousin, Aaron. After all, who is God to pick His representative, anyway?

We can now see the connection between Korah and the Reubenite tribal leaders. Both sides are feeling unfairly displaced. They want the positions that they feel are rightly theirs – Reubenites, the leadership of the tribes, which Moses holds – and Korah, the High Priesthood, which Aaron holds. An offense from generations back (Reuben) and the current generation (Korah) resonate with one another and amplify into open rebellion to change the leadership equation.

Do you see it? Korah shouts at Moses, "You have gone too far! Everyone in the entire community is holy, and the Lord is among them. *Why then do you exalt yourselves above the Lord's assembly?*" (16:3). In truth, it wasn't Moses. It was God Himself. How did Moses handle the attack? The best way possible. He immediately hits the ground in humility and gets guidance from the Lord, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will reveal who belongs to him, who is set apart, and the one he will let come near him. He will let the one he chooses come near him. Korah, you and all your followers are to do this: take firepans, and tomorrow place fire in them and put incense on them before the Lord. Then the man the Lord chooses will be the one who is set apart" (16:5-7). Moses then speaks the truth, "It is you Levites who have gone too far!" (16:7).

Moses rightly nails the issue, "Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the Israelite community to bring you near to himself, to perform the work at the Lord's tabernacle, and to stand before the community to minister to them? He has brought you near, and all your fellow Levites who are with you, *but you are pursuing the priesthood as well. Therefore, it is you and all your followers who have conspired against the Lord!* As for Aaron, who is he that you should complain about him?" (16:9-11)

The one thing Korah and the Reubenite leaders left out was Yehovah's sovereign choice and the Lord is about to make it terrifyingly clear He's in charge and will defend His chosen leaders.

The challenge is set. It's almost like a wild west showdown. Aaron is on one side with his incense pan and Korah and the Reubenite leaders with their pans are on the other side. By the way, wasn't Korah paying attention the last time someone performed a priestly task in an unauthorized way (see Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, Leviticus 10:1-2)? How did that work out for the two guys? God fired them! Literally!

Moses declares how the Lord will decide who's right and who isn't. "Then Moses said, 'This is how you will know that the Lord sent me to do all these things and that it was not of my own will: *If these men die naturally as all people would, and suffer the fate of all, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something unprecedented, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them along with all that belongs to them so that they go down alive into Sheol, then you will know that these men have despised the Lord*'" (16:28-30).

The ground opens up and the ringleaders die. Fire then shoots out from the Lord's presence in the Tabernacle and fries the 250 Reubenite leaders who followed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Case close. Discussion done, right? Nope.

"The next day the entire Israelite community complained about Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the Lord's people!'" (16:41). And here we go again! The Lord's glory appears over the Tabernacle and a plague starts among the Israelite rebels. Aaron takes an incense pan and intercedes between the living and the dead, stopping the plague. Not only does the Lord remove the challengers to Aaron's call as High Priest, but He affirms Aaron's call by using him to effectively stand in the gap *as the true High Priest is called to do*. Finally, the insurrection is halted in its tracks.

There's a note to this chapter that often gets overlooked. Yehovah tells Aaron to collect the bronze incense pans from the "toasted" leaders and hammer them as plating on the

Bronze Altar. Why? *“They will be a sign to the Israelites.”* So the priest Eleazar took the bronze firepans that those who were burned had presented, and they were hammered into plating for the altar, just as the Lord commanded him through Moses. *It was to be a reminder for the Israelites that no unauthorized person outside the lineage of Aaron should approach to offer incense before the Lord and become like Korah and his followers”* (16:38-40). What a vivid reminder to the next person who wants to rebel against the Lord’s choice for leadership. Will he or she be the next one to get hammered by the Lord?

INSIGHT

Picking up an offense is the act of taking on one’s self the offense caused another. Their offense may resonate with you, the situation may be similar, BUT it didn’t happen directly to you, therefore, the offense isn’t yours. An offense can only be dealt with between the original parties, BUT since there’s no real basis for resolution, it’s often much harder to release an offense you’ve personally adopted. So how can we deal with adopted offenses?

- Be on guard against picking up other people’s offenses lest you find yourself on the wrong side of God’s fence.
- If you’re not a part of the problem or the answer, just back away!
- When we find ourselves tempted to pick up an offense, let’s examine ourselves to see what the access point is. Is there anything in us that makes the other person’s offense appealing?
- Ultimately, God is more than able to defend the innocent and confront the offender.

February 10 : Scriptures Numbers 17-19

SUMMARY

Again, don't let the chapter numbers or the heading break the flow of the story. Chapter 17 is a direct segue from the previous chapter of Korah's rebellion. A brief recap is in order. First, the murmuring started over the difficulties of life in the wilderness (ch. 11). Then it spread to the community with discontent over the Lord's miraculous menu item, manna (ch. 11). Then the rebellious attitude reached Aaron and Miriam (ch. 12). Then, after hearing the bad spin the 10 Israelite scouts put on their report, the entire community rebelled (ch. 13-14). After the Lord punished the nation for their refusal to trust Him, the full rebellion broke out led by the Levite Korah and a contingent of leaders from the tribe of Reuben (ch. 16). As you just read, this did not end well for the instigators. And finally, the last gasps of rebellion came from many in the community who blamed Moses and Aaron for Korah and his gang's demise (ch. 16). Why? Because Moses called out what was going to happen to Korah and followers for their insurrection and it did. Therefore, Moses worked the fatal miracle. But the people missed the point. God did it to reject and punish the insurrectionists and their rejection of His leaders. Only Aaron was designated as High Priest and Moses as the designated national leader. This final spasm of rebellion was put down via a plague the Lord released on the rebels. The only thing that stopped the plague was Aaron standing between the living and the dead with an incense pan (a censer) proving his High Priestly calling.

In chapter 17, the Lord puts the exclamation point to His affirmation of His chosen leaders through a miracle. The budding of Aaron's wooden staff was not something a human being could pull off. Each staff had been named to represent a single tribe. Only Aaron's staff "had sprouted, formed buds, blossomed, and produced almonds" (17:8). Why did Yehovah do this? The staff was "to be kept as a sign for the rebels, so that you may put an end to their complaints before me, or else they will die" (17:10).

There's a delicious Hebrew pun in this event. Did you notice that the wood staff was from an *almond* tree? In Hebrew, the word for almond is *shaked* (shah-ked). It's similar to the word *shaqad* (shah-kahd) meaning "to watch." Get it? The Lord is telling any future rebels, "I've got My eye on you! I'm watching over My leaders and I'm watching to put down any future rebellions." The same pun is used in Jeremiah 1:11-12.

Since the Korah's rebellion was about usurping Aaron's place as High Priest and an unapproved person approaching the Tabernacle, chapter 18 moves to the Lord's warning to Aaron that "You, your sons, and your ancestral family will be responsible for iniquity against the sanctuary" and that he is to "guard the sanctuary and the altar so that wrath

may not fall on the Israelites again" (18:1, 5). Because of the greater and lesser areas of holiness determined by proximity to the Lord, *there's a place for everybody and everybody in their place*. Aaron's family is responsible to "carry out your priestly responsibilities for everything concerning the altar and for what is inside the curtain, and you will do that work" (18:7). The Levites outside of Aaron's family line are responsible for the area outside the Tent. The one who violates God's boundaries will die. So, do you think the Lord is serious about His holiness?

As compensation for their duties, chapter 18 continues with the Lord's instructions regarding the holy offerings of the Israelites that are the priesthood's portion for food and support. Since the Lord gets the best off the top, Aaron's family gets to enjoy a share of the best (18:12). The same rules regarding blood and fat remain along with the directions for each type of sacrifice. The tithes belong to Aaron and the priesthood and they are to make a tithe of what they receive as well.

In 18:20 the Lord explains why He's supporting the Levites this way. When the Israelites conquer Canaan in the future, the land will be divided up in 12 ways. The Levites will get no land. What we find out later is the Levites' "possession" is the Lord Himself and they will either serve at the Tabernacle or live throughout the land as spiritual supervisors and so the people will have access to those who know God's Torah.

At this point, some confusion may set in. "Wait! Aren't the Levites part of the 12 tribes? How can there be 12 tribes, not counting the Levites?" Think back to Genesis 48:5. Jacob "adopted" Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh as his sons even though they were his grandsons, thereby creating 13 tribes. This is interesting when you also remember, the firstborn son inherits a double portion of his father's estate. Well, by adopting the two boys, Jacob is designating a double portion of the Promised Land to Joseph's line. And when the Levites are called out for the Lord's service, the "landed" tribes are twelve with an extra "non-landed" tribe is serving God in place of the Israelite firstborn males. That wraps it up pretty neatly, don't you think?

Now we come to a unique offering in Numbers 19 that involves a Red Cow. It's unique because no other offering requires such a specific animal. This is a unique sacrifice that produces a unique "ingredient" for a specific purification process. It is a purification ritual to remove uncleanness due to corpse contamination, touching a dead human body.

The process is detailed in 19:1-9. Note that a major part of the process that produces the ashes from the Red Cow takes place outside the camp (19:3). The ashes are then stored in a clay pot to be used when needed. The recipe is simple: put fresh (living) water in a jar

and add a pinch of the ashes. Hyssop is used to sprinkle the water. Any person who has come in contact with a dead human body must go through the cleansing process. Once a person touches a corpse they are ritually “unclean” for 7 days. The unclean person is sprinkled with the water of purification on the 3rd and 7th day of their uncleanness. After the 2nd sprinkling, they wash their clothes and immerse themselves in water, and are clean, “decontaminated” from death.

INSIGHT

Numbers and patterns in scripture reveal awesome insights and show us how remarkable our God is. Here are the elements of the purification ritual to note: **living water, the ashes (memorializing the Red Cow’s sacrificial death), the 3rd day, and the 7th day.**

Red Cow ashes. Hebrews 13:12-13 talks about the sacrifices which are burned up outside the camp. Since Jesus was led out of Jerusalem to Golgotha to be crucified and consumed by death, the writer of Hebrews sees the correlation between Jesus’ death and the sacrificial service that forgives and cleanses the repentant person, “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood.” So the ashes of the Red Cow sacrifice can be equated with Jesus’ sacrificial death as part of our purification from death when we are saved.

Fresh (living) water. Fresh water is “living” water because it moves. It has an inflow and an outflow. Dead water is missing one of the two. That’s why a stream and rain are living water and the Dead Sea is dead. The Dead Sea has an inflow from the Jordan river, but no outflow. The water just evaporates. Dead water is stagnant water that breeds disease. Living water is used for cleansing because flowing water can never be contaminated. The flowing water continually carries away contamination.

Hyssop. Hyssop was used to apply the blood of the Passover Lamb during the first Passover in Egypt (Exodus 12:22).

3rd and 7th days. Jesus rose from death on the 3rd day and the 7th day is the Sabbath. The 7th day is also regarded as a picture of our eternal rest with God after we have been saved from death (Hebrews 4:9-11).

The purification from corpse contamination. Through Jesus' sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's action of applying Jesus' sacrifice to us, we are cleansed from the contamination from sin and the touch of death so that we can be resurrected from the dead and live in God's presence forever.

February 11 : Scriptures Numbers 20-23

SUMMARY

Since the end of the rebellion in chapter 17 time has passed during chapters 18 and 19. This chapter tells us that Israel wants to pass through Edom's territory (on the south side of the Dead Sea) but is denied passage and it records High Priest Aaron's death. Therefore, we've jumped forward about 38 years. The last of the condemned generation (20 years old and up) has died, except for a few. Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Caleb, and Moses are the only survivors. Joshua and Caleb get a pass because both of them had faith in God during the aborted attempt to enter Canaan (14:24). Joshua is also Moses' designated successor.

Chapter 20 opens with Miriam's death. She had her rebellious moment in Numbers 12, just as the national rebellion was brewing. After Aaron was affirmed as God's choice for High Priest (ch. 17) the rebellion died. However, the rebellion may be dead, but the complaining isn't.

What's the complaint this time? No water! Being short of food is one thing. We can survive without food for some time. But being without water can quickly become fatal. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out having no water in the dry wilderness is life-threatening. No wonder the people are panicking.

But this is also a new test of trust for the Israelites at the end of their journey. They've seen their God do impossible things. He's already split the waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) and made poisoned water safe (Exodus 15) and Yehovah has provided food and water where there's none (Exodus 16, 17). What makes them think He can't do the same now? But let's not be too hard on them. We've all been there. When we focus on our problem we begin to see the problem as bigger than God. But *nothing* is bigger or stronger than our God. He can do whatever He wants to do, like bring water from a rock 39 years before this situation (Exodus 17). And yet, they still complain. They should have done what Moses and Aaron did at this moment which is turning to the Lord in worship and prayer.

The Lord gives Moses simple, but precise instructions. "Take the staff and assemble the community. You and your brother Aaron are to speak to the rock while they watch, and it will yield its water. You will bring out water for them from the rock and provide drink for the community and their livestock" (20:8). That's what Moses and Aaron do... almost. Rather than *speaking* to the rock as Yehovah commanded, Moses uses the symbol of his God-given authority, his staff, and *strikes* the rock after saying, "Listen, you rebels (Hebrew word, *mara*, "to rebel, defy, become disobedient")! Must *we* bring water out of

this rock for you?" (20:10). Ouch! Did you catch the word "we"? Who's doing the miracle here, Moses or God? In a fit of anger, Moses takes the credit and the glory from God. He strikes the rock and water gushes out again. But why? Moses didn't do it in God's way. I believe it's because despite Moses' mistake, God's desire to help His people moved Him to supply their need, regardless of Moses' infraction. But Moses' mistake was about to have grave consequences for both him and Aaron.

The Lord bans Moses and Aaron from entering the Promised Land, "Because you did not trust me to demonstrate my holiness in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land I have given them" (20:12). Think about this. Moses and Aaron are 120 and 123 years old respectively. For about 80 years they've been on an awesome journey with their covenant God to fulfill His promise to Abraham that His descendants would inherit Canaan. After all that blood, sweat, and tears it's all for naught, at least for them, all because of a momentary outburst that carelessly overstepped the line of God's holiness. There's a reason God did this. If Israel's leaders treat God casually and treat His holiness lightly, then it will show the people they can do the same. God's punishment for Aaron and Moses is a huge lesson for the people, for what was the 40-year wilderness journey about but a training session for the people to live with their holy God? The section ends abruptly because there's nothing Moses can say. Case closed.

We move on now and so does Israel. Here's some context. The best way to enter *Eretz Yisrael* (Hebrew for "the land of Israel") would be to go straight north from the Desert into Israel on the west side of the Dead Sea, but that would bring Israel straight through Edom, the land of Esau's descendants. Moses sends a delegation to ask permission to cross Edom's land and Israel is denied, even after a second request and an assurance to reimburse the Edomites for any water they needed. But with Edom's refusal, Israel is now forced to move farther east around Edom and then turn north along the east side of Moabite territory to Amorite kings Sihon and Og's territory. God tells the Israelites to NOT provoke the Edomites (Deuteronomy 2:4-5).

Why does Edom refuse Israel's passage? If you answered, "Because the people of Edom are descendants of Esau and there's still animosity between the family lines from their early sibling rivalry over the birthright and the blessing," you would be correct. (If you didn't, that's okay. This wasn't a test.) The family strife between the Israelites and the Edomites will figure in again in the book of Obadiah and the Gospels.

The chapter ends with Aaron's death. Aaron died at age 123 on Av 1 (which occurs during July/August on our common calendar) in the 40th year of the Wandering. He's succeeded by his son Eleazar. The blessing of his death is that He's able to see his boy donning the

High Priestly garments and following in his footsteps. Aaron was a great father followed by a great son.

Chapter 21 opens with a short, but important account. Israel is marching through the Negev. That's the desert area on the southern end of today's Israel, west of Edom. A Canaanite king of Arad mounts an attack and captures some Israelites. What do the Israelites do? They make a vow to the Lord, "If you will hand this people over to us, we will completely destroy their cities." This is the right thing to do because Israel's ability to conquer Canaan depends on their trust in Yehovah. They call on Yehovah, He answers and helps, and Israel fulfills God's scorched earth command. (Now if they only had some giants to practice their battle and trust-in-God skills on...). So if you're following the map, Israel travels through the Negev to the east, around the south of Edom, then up the east side of Edom and Moab (the next kingdom north of the Edomites), and right up to the Amorite kingdoms. It's a lot of marching to find an entrance to Canaan, and some enemies to face.

Sigh Again with the complaining! Why are the Israelites complaining this time? Impatience. It's probably because they have to go around Edom and that adds extra miles to their walk. It almost sounds like toddlers in the back seat of the car, "Are we there, yet? Are we there, yet? Are we there, yet?" As the Bible says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12). With Edom's refusal to accommodate them, once again the people are put off a little longer. It's like they're trying to find an unlocked door. Perhaps they thought they were moving away from the Land again! This begins to reveal short tempers. Impatience is the reason for their complaint, but everything else becomes the target – no food, no water, just that detestable manna! Yeah, I get it. The same menu for 40 years! But complaining is like a poison that not only hurts the individual but sickens others around them. Yehovah sends snakes to deal with the rising discontentment. But there is a method to the Lord's punishment.

The solution Yehovah gives to Moses is for him to make a bronze snake and lift it on a pole. God's promise to Moses and the Israelites is, "When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover" (21:8). Therefore, death by snakebite *is overruled by trusting God's solution to the snake bite. God's solution is a faith lesson and His plan reveals the antidote to death.*

Now it's time to open your Bible again to the map section in the back. As the Israelites move north along the east side of the Dead Sea, they encounter the territories of Ammon (the Ammonites) and Moab (the Moabites), descendants of Israel's relatives by Abraham's nephew Lot (Genesis 19:37). Now if you look north of those domains along the Dead Sea's east side and south of the Sea of Galilee, you'll see that area was inhabited

by the Amorites, a Canaanite peoples under God's judgment. This is Israel's next training session for battle.

Long story short, King Sihon and his Amorite army attack Israel. Israel wins and takes control of their land. (Now, if they could only face a giant in battle, that would *really* increase their fighting skills and increase their confidence to defeat all the Canaanite natives, both men, and giants.)

What now comes at the Israelites from the north? King Og (*A real giant about 10-11 feet tall!*) and his army from Bashan! To help you orient yourself to the geography of today, the area that all this fighting takes place in is modern-day Jordan and the Golan Heights. God tells the Israelites to go for it and they win. King Og the giant dies. Do you see how the Lord is gradually building Israel's fighting skills and faith?

Chapter 22 begins a remarkable account of spiritual warfare. The Amorites were led by strong kings, a "normal" man (Sihon) and a giant (Og). Those Amorite kingdoms were buffer zones between Moab and the approaching 1.5 million (approx.) Israelites. But Israel just steamrolls the Amorites with God's help. After Israel defeats those two kingdoms, they move south along the Jordan until they are directly opposite Jericho on the east side of the Jordan river. They make camp on the plains of Moab located on the northeast corner of the Dead Sea. The king of Moab, Balak, is now quaking and decides he needs to roll out "the big gun" to balance the spiritual powers Balak believes are in play. Something to keep in mind is that Israel has no intention of attacking Moab. According to Deuteronomy 2:9, 19, Israel was forbidden to attack Moab. Indeed at this time, there is no physical warfare. Balak chooses spiritual warfare first. Then when that fails, he'll fall back to a different type of attack.

Balak's spiritual "big gun" is Balaam, a Gentile prophet from the east, somewhere in the area of the Euphrates river in modern-day Iraq. Balak plans to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites so that they're weakened (22:6). Then Moab can attack them and *voila!* Moab wins.

What follows is a negotiation between Balaam and Balak's representatives. On the first try, Balak sends a large fee for Balaam's services (22:7), but God specifically tells Balaam not to go (22:12). Now while Balaam tells the delegation God won't let him do the job, we begin to realize as we go through the text that he really does want to sell his services to Balak. He proves himself to be a spiritual mercenary.

After the returning delegation confers with Balak, the Moabite king sends them again with a promise to do a great honor to Balaam. Balaam's response is telling. "If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go against the command of the Lord my God to do anything small or great. Please stay here overnight as the others did, so that I may find out what else the Lord has to tell me" (22: 18-19). Either Balaam has completely denied Balak's request or, as some rabbis see, he sets a high price (a house full of money), fakes that he can't go, but leaves the door open because "he needs to confer with God," just in case.

Surprisingly, Yehovah allows Balaam to go despite His first word forbidding the prophet to do so. Did God lie? Nope. When giving Balaam permission this time, Yehovah's instructions were for Balaam to say *only* what He tells Balaam to say. Period.

So Balaam sets off for Moab. What happens next is fascinating. God's angel keeps redirecting Balaam's donkey from place to place until Balaam is cornered. The strange part is the donkey can see the angel, but the "spiritual" prophet can't! At last, Balaam's donkey moves into a very narrow place where it can only walk forward, but the angel blocks its way. So it lays down. The frustrated Balaam starts beating the donkey but stops *when the donkey starts to talk to him about his abuse*. Now, this is hilarious. No, not the talking donkey, but Balaam actually carries on a conversation with the donkey!

The Lord opens Balaam's eyes to see how close he came to doom. What's the point of this escapade? The message is a warning for Balaam to not curse those whom the Lord has already blessed and Balaam better obey. Yehovah can easily strike him down and Balaam will never see it coming. Again, Yehovah's word to Balaam is to speak *only* what Yehovah gives him (22:35). As an aside, we know the angel is a physical manifestation of God because of the angel's phrase, "Go with the men, but you are to say *only what I tell you*." So Balaam goes on his way, greets Balak, and gets to work "cursing" Israel. But first, he tells Balak the truth – he can only say what the Almighty One True God tells him to say.

There's an interesting battle shaping up here – the one who can bless and curse vs. the nation whose God protects them.

Why does Balak take Balaam up to a high place (22:41)? Because the ancients believed the higher you were in the sky, the closer to the gods you were. In a sense, a person climbs higher to hear better and Balaam "needed a clear signal." Notice that as you read through the account Balak keeps bringing Balaam up higher and higher with an increasingly wider view of the Israelites until Balaam can see the whole nation.

In the interest of brevity, I'll summarize Balaam's prophecies from God about Israel:

Balaam's 1st prophecy (chapter 23): *God's Blessing is already on them. I can only curse what God has cursed already!* Therefore, God will not curse Israel and neither is He mad at them (23:8). God's blessing on Israel is evident. They are already experiencing Abraham's blessing, becoming as the stars in the sky (innumerable). Balaam also sees that it would be best to die as one of God's people than anything else.

Balaam's 2nd prophecy: *Israel is strong because they walk with God in righteousness and their King leads them.* Hey Balak, God already said He's blessed His people. Do you think God lies or changes His mind as people do? What makes you think that He's going to deliver a different message (23:19)? God commanded me to bless them and I can't change that. God is their strength (23:22). No curse will work against them (23:23) and just as nothing threatens a lion, so Israel does what they want because God, their King, is with them (23:24). Balaam's third and fourth prophecies continue in chapter 24.

INSIGHT

As you read through the Bible, you'll begin to see how our Heavenly Father has dropped clues to His wonderful plan for our salvation. The bronze snake episode is one such clue. Do you remember that the way the people were to be saved from the snake's poison was to deliberately look at the representation of death (the image of the snake) fixed to a pole so everyone could see it? That's a perfect picture of Jesus' death on the cross for us. We're all suffering from the snake bite of Genesis 3. The poison of sin has worked its way through us and we're dying in our sin. Jesus was fixed to a cross to become the "image of the snake" that neutralizes sin's poison in us when we look to God's plan in faith.

Check this out, *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God"* (John 3:14-18). Sse? Those who do not trust in Jesus as God's plan for getting saved are already poisoned and are heading toward the inevitability of separation from God forever. But looking to Jesus' death for us neutralizes that poison. Puts the well-known John 3:16 in a whole new light, doesn't it? I pray you take this verse to heart.

Here's a companion verse to think about, "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). See? Jesus "became the snake on the pole" so that we can be healed.

February 12 : Scriptures Numbers 24-26

SUMMARY

Balaam's 3rd prophecy (chapter 24): *Balaam sees how God has blessed Israel.* Previously, Balaam used divination (sacrifices and altars) for spiritual receptivity. Now he simply turns his eyes toward the entire camp of Israel spread out below him and gets smacked with an open vision. For the first time in Balaam's life, God doesn't just "happen upon him" (23:4, 16). The Spirit of God comes upon him sovereignly and unfolds the panorama of prophecy to him. This is such a remarkable prophecy from a Gentile prophet that the phrase, "How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwellings, Israel" (24:5) is used in Jewish worship services today. And here's a kicker. Remember Yehovah's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 "I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt?" What is Balaam's prophecy (24:9), but the Lord's same words from Genesis 12:3, "Those who bless you will be blessed, and those who curse you will be cursed."

And now Balak is mad! He hired Balaam to curse Israel and all he's done is bless them. Balaam explains he can't do anything else while under the Lord's power (24:12-13). Balaam not only receives a word about Israel, but the anointing on him is so strong that he also gets an unsought word for the nations around Israel (24:14).

Balaam's 4th prophecy: *God will bring forth an Israelite king, specifically from the tribe of Judah, who will conquer the Moabites, Shethites, and Edomites. Amalek will be destroyed as will the Kenites and those of Asshur and Eber.*

And thus ends Balak's attempts to curse Israel. The Sovereign Lord has everything in His control, especially a mercenary prophet. However, wicked Balaam has another plan. Israel is encamped on the plains of Moab between the Jordan river to the west and the mountains of Moab to the east, and they have no idea of the attempted spiritual attack going on above them. But what they do see are some Moabite women.

Balaam indeed finds a way to get his money from Balak. He gives the king a strategy to see Israel harmed. It's this: "If we can't destroy them ourselves, we will help them destroy themselves." Since Balaam can't use his mouth to harm Israel, he abandons the *divination* thing and resorts to the *devious* thing. He comes up with a plan that will result in Israel committing iniquity and perverseness. Then God Himself will become a curse to the Israelites and act against them. How? By prompting the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men and entice them into Baal worship (25:1-2). Under the Torah, idolatry was a capital offense (Exodus 22:20). The Lord specifically warned the Israelites about being

seduced by pagan women, "Then you will take some of their daughters as brides for your sons. Their daughters will prostitute themselves with their gods and cause your sons to prostitute themselves with their gods" (Exodus 34:16). That's exactly what Balaam makes happen. First, the Israelite men cavort with the Moabite women and are led into idolatry. The Lord tells Moses to assemble the leaders and put the guilty leaders to death (25:5). Then during a time of national repentance when everyone was grieving over the egregious situation before the Lord, an Israelite man had the gall to bring a Midianite woman into the camp (25:6). So why is that so bad? After all, didn't Moses marry a Midianite woman named Zipporah? Yes, but Moses did that *before* the Lord gave the restriction 40 years later. And in this case, the Moabite and Midianite women were intended to coax the Israelite men into idolatry through sexual enticement.

This brazen act causes Phinehas, the High Priest Eleazar's son and Aaron's grandson, to spring into action. With righteous anger, Phinehas grabs a spear and pins the "embracing" couple to the ground (25:8-9)! This act is commended by the Lord and results in not only the cessation of a plague that was spreading among the people, but guarantees Phinehas a perpetual priesthood for him and his descendants!

In retaliation for the sneaky and deadly assault on Israel, the Lord commands the Israelites to attack the Midianites (25:16-18).

And now we move to chapter 26. Yup, another census. I have to admit, it's not particularly fascinating reading for me, either. However, it's the gems found in the details that are worth it, but those often pop out with deeper study. Here are some I've found over the years.

First, the census had to be performed, because the previous one was completed at the beginning of the Israelites long 40-year journey (Numbers 1). The total of men 20-years-old and up at that time was a fighting force of 603,550. Now, 39 years later, the total is 601,730 (26:51), a difference of only 1,830 men. The rabbis see this as evidence of the Lord's hand preserving His people despite all the hardships and punishments they endured in the wilderness.

Second, according to *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki from the Middle Ages), "Serah (a woman) is mentioned in the list of men because she was Jacob's only living granddaughter" (26:46).

Finally, the census was to determine how Joshua should divide the land according to each tribe's population (26:53). And with that, we conclude today's *Cruisin' Through The Bible*.

INSIGHT

Balaam's remarkable 4th prophecy contains the verse, "I see him, but not now; I perceive him, but not near. A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel" (24:17). This prophetic insight is amazing, not just because he saw Israel's Messiah, Jesus, about 1,440 before he was born, but how did Balaam know Israel's final king would rise from the tribe of Judah? Did Balaam talk to the Israelites to learn the names of each tribe? The text doesn't say so. There is no mention in the text that Balaam had any interaction with the Israelites. Also, Balaam lived a great distance from Egypt and the events of the Exodus and the Wilderness wandering. Perhaps he had heard rumors? But then again, how likely is it he heard of the tribe of Judah? Also, his prophecy matches the same word Jacob received about Judah being the kingly tribe in Israel? This was truly a prophecy from God that came from both an Israelite and a Gentile, "Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true" (John 8:17).

Not only that, but a key figure in the Messiah's family line will come from Moab – Ruth! She would be the great-grandmother to Israel's great king, David, and Israel's greatest future king, Jesus.

Though king Balak of Moab tried to curse Israel through the Gentile prophet, Balaam, God caused the people of Moab to actually bring about Messiah's lineage and the king will eventually rule both Jews and Gentiles.

February 13 : Scriptures Numbers 27-30

SUMMARY

Alright, here we are for today's Cruisin' Through The Bible, chapter 27, and we smack right into one of those great Hebrew names – Zelophehad (*Zay-loh'-feh-hahd*). Fun, isn't it? Drop that one at your next dinner party or Christian Education class and really impress 'em!

This is an interesting account because of what the rabbis conclude about Zelophehad's daughters. They were descended from Joseph, the patriarch who loved the Promised land so much, he commanded the Israelites to take his body from his Egyptian tomb and carry it to Canaan when the Lord led them out of Egypt in the future. Joseph's request also came from his commitment to Yehovah's covenant with his great-great-grandfather Abraham. The rabbis say the daughters loved the land as much as their ancestor Joseph did.

According to rabbinic commentary, the daughters desired to have a legal claim to a parcel of the Promised Land that moved them to make their request of Moses. Up to that point, only sons would inherit the family land. But Zelophehad had no sons. Therefore, Zelophehad's land would, under normal circumstances, pass to the closest male relative and Zelophehad's family line would disappear. The daughters raise their questions, "Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan? Since he had no son, give us property among our father's brothers" (27:4). The women had a legitimate concern. Their father died and was not among those who had sinned in Korah's rebellion. Why should they lose their share in the land?

So, Moses takes their case to the Lord and Yehovah gives a new and just ruling, "What Zelophehad's daughters say is correct. You are to give them hereditary property among their father's brothers and transfer their father's inheritance to them" (27:7). So, here is the new flow of inheritance per God's command: From father to son to daughter to uncle to great uncle to nearest relative. Since all Jews have a common progenitor (Jacob), everyone has a relative somewhere so the land will never pass out of Israel's line. Problem solved. Plus, the daughters of Zelophehad gain the same notoriety in Israel along with the guys who wanted to celebrate Passover, but couldn't because they touched a dead body (Numbers 9:6-11). Both of their needs prompted God to create new commands to address their unique situations. The ruling with Zelophehad's daughters also proved another point – the Lord's compassion is for men *and* women despite patriarchal rules and customs. Something to ponder.

We now come closer to the end of the Wilderness Wandering. The Lord is going to give Moses a remarkable view of Israel from Mount Nebo. It's obvious Moses doesn't ascend Mount Nebo immediately since there's so much left to do, i.e. appoint Joshua, reiterate the Torah (Deuteronomy), etc., but he will go up and when he does, he will die. As decreed in the recent striking-the-rock-for-water incident, the Lord won't allow Moses into Canaan because of his and Aaron's previous disobedience, glory-stealing, and violation of God's holiness (27:14). Sadly, the leaders succumbed to pride and it cost them dearly.

Moses realizes that his death is approaching and, as the wonderful shepherd that he is, is concerned for the sheep. They will need a shepherd who will lead them into the land, into the green pastures. Yehovah agrees. Whom should He select? Why, the only other person in Israel who spent time in Yehovah's holy presence, Joshua! Joshua was the disciple who lingered with the Lord and the leadership (Exodus 33:11). Here's a good tip: Leadership is best when it is mentored up from the roots.

Chapters 28-29 give us additions to the mandated sacrifices. These are the sacrifices for the Daily (*Tamid*), Sabbath, New Moon (at the beginning of every month as determined by the moon's phase, called *Rosh Chodesh*), Passover (*Pesach*), Weeks/Pentecost (*Shavuot*), Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*), Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), and the 8th day of Tabernacles (*Shemini Atzeret* – "8th completion") observances. Yes, I know it's repetitive, but purposefully read through it all.

As you get to the extra offerings for Tabernacles (29:12-34) pay attention to the number of bulls being offered. *They decrease by one bull each day.* When you add up the number of bulls over the week of offerings, it's a total of 70 bulls. 70 is an important number to the rabbis because it represents their number of nations created at the tower of Babel correlated with the list of nations in Genesis 10. God has called Israel to be the Light To The Nations, that is, to bring the revelation of the One True God to the world (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3). Since there are 70 bulls offered at Tabernacles, the rabbis see this as Israel making offerings on behalf of the whole world.

Chapter 30 may seem unimportant, but it's not. It's about the importance and strength of vows, and how God holds people to their promises to Him and one another. A vow is a *very serious thing* to God. This is more than keeping one's word. Vows in this sense have to do with promises to give something to the Lord (a sacrifice or devoted object) and vows people take upon themselves.

Vows are so important there is a special addition to the annual Yom Kippur service for the erasure and forgiveness of all unfulfilled vows from the year before. Deuteronomy 23:21 cautions the Israelites about vows, "If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to keep it, because he will require it of you, and it will be counted against you as sin." Proverbs 20:25 admonishes us, "It is a trap for anyone to dedicate something rashly and later to reconsider his vows." A big caution is from Ecclesiastes 5:1-6,

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Better to approach in obedience than to offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do wrong. *Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive to make a speech before God.* God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. Just as dreams accompany much labor, so also a fool's voice comes with many words. *When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because he does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake.* Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands?"

We've already seen in Numbers 6 how Yehovah recognizes the Nazirite vow and holds a person to that vow until they fulfill it. In this chapter, the Lord shows that vows can be made, but are subject to the permission of greater authorities. In other words, an authority can nullify a subordinate's vow. For example, fathers can nullify an unmarried daughter's vow and a husband can nullify a wife's vow. Yes, I know what you're thinking. That patriarchy thing again. Well, that's just how it was in ancient Israel at the time. If you go back to Genesis 1-2, you'll see that man and woman were created to live and work as equals even though they functioned differently as to gender. I'll tell you this after 38 years of marriage, *it's best if both people agree to a vow, promise, or commitment rather than one of them imposing their decision on the other.* Do that and you're inviting marital strife.

This chapter helps us see the difference between a vow (*neder*, nay-dare') and an oath. A vow (such as promising to give an animal to the Lord as a sacrifice) changes the status of the thing/object being vowed. It changes from "belonging to the owner" to "belonging to the Lord." An engagement is a vow. It changes the status of the woman from "belonging to her father's family" to "belonging to her husband and her husband's family." The same can be done with land or any other object. You can't vow a firstfruit or a firstborn, because they already belong to the Lord. One of the things to notice is the "time limit" as passive consent. "But if her husband cancels them *on the day he hears about it*, nothing that came from her lips, whether her vows or her obligation, is binding. Her husband has canceled them, and the Lord will release her" (30:14). But "If her husband *says nothing at all to her*

from day to day, he confirms all her vows and obligations, which are binding. He has confirmed them because he said nothing to her when he heard about them” (30:14). However, “if he cancels them after he hears about them, he will be responsible for her commitment” (30:15). In other words, if he hears about the vow and does nothing about it for a day, then cancels the vow, he’s stuck with the obligation to pay the vow. I don’t know about you, but I find that a bit funny as it forces the man (father, husband) to make a decision and not let the issue linger.

An oath obligates a person to do or not do something, but their state remains the same. Let’s say a person vows to give a particular apple to the Lord. Therefore, the apple now belongs to the Lord. The person can’t eat it because it doesn’t belong to them. However, a person can take an oath to eat an apple every day. The apples still belong to him or her, but they are now obligated to fulfill their apple-eating oath. Vows are about objects. Oaths are about actions.

INSIGHT

Take heart! Moses *does* make it to the Promised Land. Doesn’t he appear with Elijah and Jesus on Mount Hermon during the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28)? God’s mercy is great and His plan is amazing!

Here are some more things to consider. 1) When God does a new thing, He often removes one set of leadership and raises a new set. When you see leadership shift from person to person, look to see if God is doing something new with that group of people. 2) Moses (*Moshe*) sets the stage and Joshua (*Yehoshua*) is positioned to lead them in. The Torah sets the stage for what is needed for our salvation (setting the standard for holiness and right standing with God) and Jesus (*Yeshua*) leads us in through His sacrifices to free us from sin.

February 14 : Scriptures Numbers 31-33

SUMMARY

Chapter 31 begins with payback! Remember the Lord's word to Moses after the Moabite women seduced the Israelite men (Numbers 25) and a Midianite woman was involved? "The Lord told Moses, 'Attack the Midianites and strike them dead. For they attacked you with the treachery that they used against you in the Peor incident. They did the same in the case involving their sister Cozbi, daughter of the Midianite leader who was killed the day the plague came at Peor'" (25:16-18). The Lord now commands Moses to do this and after the battle is done, Moses is going to die.

So, Israel sends 12,000 troops, 1,000 from each tribe, to fight the Midianites. Israel wins because God is with them. The soldiers kill every male who is present. Balaam is finally killed (31:8)! The Sages say that Balaam's plan of seduction succeeded so Balaam was in Midian to collect his payment. After the battle, the Israelites take the women and their dependents captive along with the Midianite's animals and property. But wait! Wasn't it the Midianite women that were part of the original problem? Yes, and Moses calls the soldiers out on this (31:15-17). He tells the troops to kill every Midianite person except the unmarried women. I admit it. This is pretty brutal stuff. Why would Moses make such a call? Because the unmarried young women can be incorporated into Israel through marriage since they haven't already bound themselves to a Midianite man. Also, the prohibition is about intermarriage with the Canaanite pagan tribes, not non-Israelite nations surrounding Canaan. The Midianites lived east of the Jordan river and are "fair game."

Also after the battle, the Israelite fighters are commanded to stay outside the camp for seven days and are to purify themselves on the 3rd and 7th days. Okay, quiz time. What does this pertain to? *Yes!* It's the purification from corpse contamination process (the ashes of the Red Cow) from Numbers 19. See? The text doesn't mention it, but the one-week/3rd and 7th-day elements make it clear.

Next, all the booty from the battle needs to be koshered (cleansed). That which can withstand fire (metals) is heated. That which can't is washed with water. Then the spoils of war are divided up. The spoils are initially divided between the people and the fighters, 50/50. According to this division, the fighters get the larger shares. David later adjusts this so that fighters who fight and those who stay behind share equally (1 Samuel 20:34-35).

Chapter 32 covers an interesting account for which you need your Bible's map section again. Look on the map that shows where Israel's tribes eventually settled. Look to the east side of the Jordan river. You should see coloring or borders outlining Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. In modern-day geography, this covers the nation of Jordan and Israel's Golan Heights (and some of Syria as well). Now if the Israelites were commanded to take over Canaan which was entirely on the west side of the Jordan river, why are these groups on the east side? This chapter explains why.

The areas on the east side of the Jordan are great for grazing livestock and these tribes had a lot of livestock. Therefore, they want the good grazing land even though it's "outside" of God's Promised Land (32:1-5). *Actually, it isn't!* If you recall, God promised Abraham's descendants *all the land* from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. Israel's initial possession was to start with Canaan, west of the Jordan. But this presents a problem.

39 years earlier, Israel balked at entering Canaan for fear of the Canaanite warriors and giants. As a result, Yehovah sent them on a wilderness journey so the faithless generation would never enter the land. Now it seems like the tribes of Reuben and Gad are repeating the same thing. Not only that, if Reuben and Gad settle down on the east side, then that takes away a serious contingent of fighters the remaining Israelites will need to conquer the territory on the west side. Moses is more than a little upset with their proposal, "Should your brothers go to war while you stay here? Why are you discouraging the Israelites from crossing into the land the Lord has given them? That's what your ancestors did when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to see the land. After they went up as far as Eshcol Valley and saw the land, they discouraged the Israelites from entering the land the Lord had given them... And here you, a brood of sinners, stand in your ancestors' place adding even more to the Lord's burning anger against Israel. If you turn back from following him, he will once again leave this people in the wilderness, and you will destroy all of them" (32:6-9, 14-15).

However, the two tribes clarify their request. They're willing to leave their families and flocks on the east side of the Jordan river to join their brothers on the west side to help them win their inheritance, i.e. fight until the land is ready to be settled, but not completely cleared (32:16-19). This satisfies Moses. He relays the decision to the other leaders, Eleazar the High Priest, Joshua, and the heads of the other 10 tribes. So, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh get their inheritance a little early (32:33-38). However, this issue comes up later in the book of Joshua.

Chapter 33 is a travelogue of Israel's journey from Egypt to Moab on the edge of Canaan. There are 42 stops along the way. It's fun to go through the list to see how many of the "points of interest" you can recall from what you've read in Exodus through Numbers. Here are some observations:

When Israel left Egypt, they left boldly, with heads held high (33:3)! They marched out in full view of the Egyptians who were burying their dead. Should we have the same confidence and boldness in the face of our spiritual enemy, Satan, as we have left him and his kingdom in the dust?

Here's a reminder for verse 15 – The Israelites encamped for a year at Sinai after the Exodus, during which the events of the Torah, Tabernacle, and the Golden Calf occurred. Then they set out.

Verse 38 addresses High Priest Aaron's death. According to tradition, Aaron died on Mount Hor in Edom on the 9th of Av. This date is the notorious date where many bad things have happened to the Jewish people.

And in verses 41-43, this route follows the detour around the land of Edom, since the king refused Israel passage. It was during this detour that the Israelites complained to God and Moses, resulting in the snake attack.

And finally, the Israelites receive instructions from the Lord about their soon-to-begin conquest of Canaan. 1) Drive out the inhabitants, 2) demolish *any* vestige of their pagan gods, 3) Possess the land, and 4) Divide it up. And then the big warning, "But if you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those you allow to remain will become barbs for your eyes and thorns for your sides; they will harass you in the land where you will live. And what I had planned to do to them, I will do to you" (33:55-56). Okay, duly noted!

INSIGHT

Some see Reuben and Gad's request as a compromise. The land they wanted had already been conquered when the Israelites took down Kings Sihon and Og. Rather than receive a portion in Canaan, one that must still be fought for, Reuben and Gad "settled" for the easy side, fit for grazing though it was. There may be some merit to this claim of compromise. If so, it teaches us a lesson. About 700 years later, the Assyrians attacked Israel. One of their attacks was this area east of the Jordan river. The Reubenites and the Gadites were among the first to be exiled by Israel's enemies. Could it be said that

compromise opens us up to the enemy's attack and makes us easy to conquer? Something to think about.