

People on the Move: The Book of Numbers
The Second Generation: Admonitions

Lesson #12 for December 19, 2009

Scriptures: Numbers 26-32; Romans 5.

1. This lesson focuses on events which took place over the short period of time between the disastrous immorality that occurred at Baal-Peor and the three speeches given by Moses which are recorded in Deuteronomy. These events include: 1) Another census was taken; 2) Rules were spelled out about female inheritance; 3) Moses was reminded that he would not be allowed to go into the promised land and so Joshua was appointed as his replacement; 4) The sacrificial system was reviewed briefly; 5) Rules were given for making and keeping vows; 6) The holy war against the Midianites was fought; 7) Directions were given for dividing up the land; and 8) Gilead was apportioned to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh.
2. By this time, Moses had been told a second time that he would not be allowed to enter the land of Canaan. Try to imagine Moses' feelings. The Israelites were just about to enter the land that had been promised to Abraham more than 400 years earlier. Moses had given up his right to be the next Pharaoh. After working so hard for 40 years to lead the children of Israel to that point, he was told that instead of entering Canaan, he was to climb Mount Nebo where he would die.
3. Read Hebrews 4:5-11. Review what had happened to the first generation that left Egypt. If the second generation of Hebrews was not any better than the first, why did God lead them into Canaan? Was it that the Canaanites were so wicked that God had to get rid of them? Had the children of Israel really learned any lessons from the many mistakes which their parents had made? Or, did God need to say something important about Himself? Remember the conversations between Moses and God. (Exodus 32:11-14; Numbers 14:13-19) **Did God need to take them into Canaan because He had promised? What is God supposed to do with us today? Aren't we supposed to be entering the "heavenly Canaan"? How many Christians—even Christian pastors—are focusing on God's reputation in the same way many of the Old Testament prophets did? (Daniel 9:5-19; especially 15-19; Ezekiel 36:16-38)**
4. Read Numbers 26:1-65. Why did God kill 70,000 people when David tried to take a census about 400 years later? (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21) We do not know how long this census took. But, based on what we know from the book of Numbers, its purpose was to show that none of those men who were over the age of 20 when they left Egypt—except Caleb and Joshua—actually entered the land of Canaan. (Numbers 26:64,65) The census also provided a basis on which to fairly divide the land of Canaan. What do those two censuses teach us about God's ability to predict the future? Did God kill all those men? Or, was He able to see exactly what would happen in the future?
5. During the process of the census, one family was discovered that had seven daughters but no sons. Should their inheritance among the people of God "die out" because Zelophehad had no sons? That question was taken to Moses. Read Numbers 27:1-11. While the Jewish nation was basically patriarchal and inheritance was supposed to be passed through sons, at that time God took some initial steps to clearly spell out the rights of women. In light of what you know about subsequent Jewish history, do you think that rule was carefully followed? Later, Moses gave some additional instructions about the passing of inheritance to make sure that the land inherited by daughters did not pass out of the hands of the tribe to which those daughters belonged. (Numbers 36:1-12)

6. In the book of Deuteronomy, which we will not be covering in this study, God and Moses clearly spelled out the future desires, plans, and mistakes that God foresaw among the children of Israel. Read Deuteronomy 6:4,5. How different might things have been for Israel subsequently if they had always made God first in their lives? What about us?
7. Considering these final events in the life of Moses, would you describe their government as a democracy? Or was it a theocracy? Did God clearly recognize the rights of individuals? Would you be happy with such a government?
8. How do you think Moses felt as he made all those preparations for the children of Israel to enter the land while he himself knew for sure that he would not be with them? Was he bitter? Did he complain against God? After 80 years of preparation, he took on the very difficult role of leading that bunch of rebels for 40 years from Egypt to Canaan. On just one occasion, he got upset, and God did not let him enter the land of Canaan.
9. What was Moses' first concern when God told him once again that he would not be allowed to enter the land? The children of Israel were about to experience the promise that had been made to their ancestor Abraham more than 400 years earlier. Moses was particularly concerned about who would lead the children of Israel. Notice that he did not suggest the names of either of his own sons. He simply asked God who should lead. God chose the person with probably the most experience among those who were "left behind." Joshua (Jesus, in Greek) was to be Moses' appointed successor. But, he was not to be authoritarian nor to rule by himself. He was to seek continual guidance by consulting with God and Eleazar who had taken Aaron's place.
10. Changes of government are dangerous times. So often we see a radical change in how things are done, or things fall apart. God made provision for the smoothest possible transition.
11. Review Numbers 28 and 29. God briefly summarized what He expected of the children of Israel in terms of daily, weekly Sabbath, monthly, and annual festivals. Each of those occasions was to be accompanied by a specific set of offerings. Remember that those offerings were in addition to all individual offerings. The daily sacrifices were never allowed to stop burning on the altar of burnt offering. By that, the children of Israel were supposed to understand that God's care for them was uninterrupted. The priests were expected to explain to the people the meaning of each of those sacrifices and festivals as they occurred. Did they do that? Do we have any record of it?
12. Besides the twice daily sacrifices, there were special sacrifices to be offered on Sabbath and special sacrifices to be offered on the first day of each month. In addition, there were the following annual festivals: 1) Passover on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year (during March-April in our calendar); [These dates vary from year to year because they are determined based on the lunar calendar which is a little different from our annual calendar.] 2) The Festival of Harvest, Pentecost (Fifty-days festival), or Firstfruits which occurred seven weeks later in June; 3) Three more festivals were grouped together, and they occurred in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. That would correspond to late September or early October on our calendar. The first was the Feast of Trumpets which was on the first day of the seventh month. Then, on the 10th day of the seventh month, Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement took place, and it was the most holy day in the Jewish calendar. Five days later was the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles (or Tents/Shelters); it lasted for a full week. The Feast of Tabernacles was to be a reminder of all that God had done for them in bringing them through the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and into the land of Canaan. Every Jewish male over the age of 12 who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was expected to attend every one of these festivals. As many as possible of the those living farther away were also to attend.

Some Christians teach that we should still be observing those festivals. What is the basis for

that idea? In the Old Testament, the Jews were told to observe those festivals for all time to come. In the New Testament, Christians are told that they are the “true children of Abraham.” On that basis, some say that Christians should still be observing those rites. Those festivals are not related to the modern holidays of Christmas or Easter. Christmas and Easter are based on ancient pagan festivals. Christmas was based on the birthday of Tammuz, one of the ancient fertility gods; Easter was supposed to be the anniversary of the day of his conception.

13. A few other items of final business needed to be worked out. First, Moses was instructed by God to spell out for the people what to do with vows made to the Lord. When living in a fairly tightknit community, it is essential that people tell the truth and can be trusted to carry out their work and abide by their word. But, there are occasional circumstances which would necessitate an exception to that rule. Look at Numbers 30. In particular, the vows of young women could be overruled by their fathers or their husbands under certain strict circumstances. Nevertheless, the principle is still true: “The obligation to which ones word is pledged—if it does not bind him to perform a wrong act—should be held sacred.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 506. We must acknowledge the cultural differences of those days.
14. It is less common in our day for people to make formal promises to God. But, those things which we do promise to God should be considered very sacred. We should also keep our promises to others. And finally, placing ourselves last, we must be willing to sacrifice our own happiness and to serve others. How many problems in society could be avoided—especially in families—if every person operated on those principles?
15. Two and one-half of the tribes of Israel had looked over the beautiful grazing land in the area of Gilead. That was the territory which had been conquered when they destroyed the kingdoms of Sihon and Og. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh had large flocks. The Gilead Heights was a wonderful place to pasture those flocks. Therefore, they went to Moses with a request for that area to be their inheritance. The first reaction of Moses was to think that they were trying to shirk their duty and avoid the hazards of conquering the land of Canaan. He spoke sharply to them. But, they assured Moses that that was not their goal at all.
16. Numbers 32:1-5, 16-42 is a beautiful example of how a little flexibility can prevent a lot of conflict. How often do we see conflicts in our families, our communities, and even in our churches because someone is not flexible or jumps to conclusions without considering all of the facts?
17. In the last three lessons of this series, we have reviewed both the good and bad events that took place as final preparations occurred for entering the promised land. A short time later, Moses gave his three speeches which are recorded in Deuteronomy, and then he climbed to the top of Mount Nebo and died. How did the people feel as they watched Moses climb Mount Nebo? After he died, God buried him. Three days later, God returned to resurrect him and take him to the “heavenly Canaan.” (Which would you rather enter, the earthly Canaan or the heavenly Canaan?) Can you imagine with what anxiety Moses watched future events unfold as the Israelites entered the earthly Canaan? Considering all they went through to establish this church, what will our church pioneers think when they reach heaven and are able to look back and see what happened to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Could they have even dreamed we would still be here in 2009? How much do you think is implied by the famous statement by Ellen White: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history”?—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, page 196.
18. In Numbers 25 and 26, Moses did not hesitate to mention some of the terrible problems that had taken place in the relatively recent history of Israel: 1) Just a short time earlier, 24,000 people had died because of their immorality; 2) Korah, Dathan, and Abiram’s rebellion had taken place some 40 years earlier; 3) Nadab and Abihu were struck dead in the temple a short time before

that; and 4) Er and Onan, the sons of Judah, were killed by God four generations earlier; (Genesis 38:2-10; 46:12) 5) Then, the census proved that the first generation of Israel—all who had left Egypt as adults except Caleb and Joshua—had died in the wilderness. The Bible clearly states that all the fighting-aged men had died. What about the women? Did all of the adult women die too?

19. Could you make a list of the successes and failures of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1844? Can you clearly trace what the causes were for each of the successes and failures? What can we learn from our own church history?
20. Through all of these events that we are studying, we must remember that God already knew far in advance exactly what was going to happen at each step. He understood the future rebellions and the deterioration into idolatry and immorality that would characterize the northern kingdom until it disappeared “into history.” He knew about the ups and downs of the southern kingdom of Judah. He knew that someday, about 1400 years in the future, those same people would reject His Son, and that would lead to His final rejection of them as His special people. When God established the Christian church, he made it abundantly clear that all people were to be treated equally. (See, for example, Galatians 3:28,29)
21. In light of all this, look at what God showed Moses on the top of Mount Nebo just before he died. Moses was allowed to see the land of Canaan, not in its blighted condition, but as it would have been under God’s direction. Then he saw the long history of Israel’s rebellion and downfall. He saw the life of Christ and His terrible persecution and death. Then he saw the rise of the Christian Church and its fearful rejection of God’s law and the second coming of Christ. Finally, he was shown the heavenly Canaan and the happiness of those who dwell there. (See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 469-480; compare Deuteronomy 34)
22. Then Moses’ vision faded and the tired, old warrior laid down to rest. The angels buried him. A short time later, Christ Himself accompanied by a group of angels came to resurrect him. Satan and his angels were on hand to dispute Christ. But Christ did not waste His time arguing with the Devil, but simply said, “The Lord rebuke you.” (Jude 9) (How often do we get into trouble because we stop to argue with the Devil?) Try to imagine that argument between God and the Devil! That is the first record we have of a direct conflict between God and the Devil after the Devil was cast out of heaven. Thus, the realm of the dead was breached. For the first time, someone who had died was resurrected to eternal life. God proved that He had the power over both life and death and that Satan could not resist Him. Are you ready to follow the example of Moses? Think of all the trials and troubles he suffered through without complaining. If it had not been for that one sin of misrepresenting God at the rock—the very type of sin that led to Satan’s downfall in heaven—Moses would have been allowed to enter the earthly land of Canaan, and then, he would have been translated without seeing death. Was it all worth it? Was God fair to Moses? Which would you rather enter: the earthly Canaan or the heavenly Canaan? (See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 469-480)
23. What did the angels think about God’s handling of all of those details? Were they happy to welcome Moses to heaven? What should we learn about God from those events? Can you imagine what the angels thought as Moses entered heaven. Enoch had preceded him, but he had not died first.

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