

Sunday, September 8, 2024 pm

JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE (31)

Wilderness Wanderings – 2

Tonight, we continue our “journey through the Bible”. We are currently examining Israel in the wilderness. We have noted Israel’s exodus from Egypt, arrival at Mt. Sinai and the word done there, leaving Mt. Sinai, and in our last lesson we noted some events, primarily in Numbers that occurred including, their 38 years of wilderness wanderings (after leaving Sinai), the rebellion of Korah, their continued ingratitude and fiery serpents being sent, and Moses’ error at Kadesh that resulted in him being denied entrance into Canaan. We also briefly mentioned how Edom (Esau) refused them passage and battles with king Sihon and Og. Tonight, we want to notice some other events as they arrive and prepare to enter the promised land.

I. More events in the wilderness.

- a. **Sihon and Og defeated** - Num 21:21-35. Recall that Israel had to travel around Edom because they were refused passage. As noted, Edom was a distant kinsman (through Esau) which is why YHWH did not permit the taking of that land. They come to Bashan and the land of the Amorites and make the same offer of passage through their land. Og too, refuses passage and comes to attack Israel with his army. But, unlike Edom, these were not near kinsmen. Israel defeated and utterly destroyed them and took possession of their land. YHWH was beginning to instill confidence in Israel as they prepared to conquer Canaan. Next, Og, king of Bashan, north of the Amorite territory also attacked Israel. YHWH was with Israel and they defeated Bashan as well and took possession of their land. Deuteronomy 2:26 – 3:11 retells the taking of these countries and they began to inhabit land (which would be helpful as the men engaged in battle in Canaan. NOTE: Deut. 3:11 describes Og as a giant. Recall how one of the excuses given 38 years earlier when Israel refused to enter Canaan was that there were giants in the land (Num. 13:33).
- b. **Balaam and Balak** – recorded in Numbers 22-24, we find Balak, king of Moab has seen the success of Israel in battles. He wants to defeat Israel with enchantments and curses from God. He sends nobles to hire Balaam, described as a soothsayer (diviner) by Joshua when he was killed (Joshua 13:22). The first time, Balaam inquires of YHWH who told him to not go that the people were blessed (Num. 22:12). But they return with greater reward, he asks YHWH again. He is told he could go but to only speak what he was told. On the way, his donkey saves his life 3 times as the angel of the LORD stood in the way to kill him. After the donkey speaks to him, he is permitted to go but told again to only speak what YHWH told him. We then have 4 different times Balaam blesses Israel. Each time, Balak becomes angrier because he hired him to curse the people. The ONLY noble thing about Balaam is his declaration that he could ONLY speak what YHWH intended for him to say.
- c. **Sadly, the story does not end there** – Numbers 25 records the harlotry of Israel while camped at Acacia Grove. Women of Moab (the nation of Balak) along with Midianites (25:6) (NOTE: Num. 22:4-5 shows that they conspired together to defeat Israel, both in Balaam’s curse and this harlotry), entered the camp and committed fornication with Israelites. 25:2 notes that they invited the people to sacrifice to their gods. The anger of YHWH was once again aroused and another plague broke out. Moses ordered the judges of Israel to execute any who were under their responsibility who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor. We then read of one incident where (25:7-9), an Israelite man (Zimri, son of Salu, a leader of Simeon) presented a Midianite

- woman (Cozbi, daughter of Zur – a Midian leader) (Num. 25:14-15) in the sight of Moses and the congregation who were weeping because of the destruction. Phinehas, son of Eleazar with zeal for YHWH took a javelin and thrust both fornicators through killing them. The plague stopped at that moment (24,000 died). Phinehas was praised for his efforts (Num. 25:10-13) and YHWH made a covenant with him that his priesthood would be an everlasting priesthood because of his zeal. YHWH ordered Israel to “harass” Midian for what they had done (25:16-18). We will revisit this in a few moments.
- d. **2nd census taken** – Numbers 26. Moses is ordered (again) to take a census of the men, 20 y/o and above able to go to war (this tells us we are nearing the end of their wanderings). (NOTE: The 1st census is found in Numbers 1:1-3 – the beginning of this book). They are numbered and total 601,730 (soldiers - vs. 51). This number would also be used to divide the land according to size of tribes (vs. 53-56). The Levites were also numbered at 23,000 (1month old and above) – vs. 57-63. NOTE Num. 26:64-65 – all who were originally numbered had died, except Caleb and Joshua.
 - e. **Inheritance laws** - Num. 27:1-11. We have noted that sprinkled throughout the record of Israel in the wilderness is various law that would apply to Israel in Canaan. We find here an inheritance law, namely that if a man died with no sons, the inheritance could be passed to his daughters, then his brothers, then his uncles on his father’s side, then the closest relative. This has bearing on maintaining their heritage.
 - f. **Joshua is appointed to replace Moses to lead Israel** – Numbers 27:12-23. He was to go to Mt. Abarim and there have Eleazar inaugurate him (verifying him as leader with the Urim) before the congregation.
 - g. **More laws of Israel** – Num. 28-30 remind Israel of various feasts and the offerings they were required to make at the feasts. Then they were reminded about the importance of vows that they took -
 - h. **Dealing with the Midianites** – Numbers 31. Recall the instructions of YHWH in ch. 25:16-18. We find here that they are commanded to take vengeance against the Midianites. Moses is told when he is finished he would be gathered to his people. 1000 from each tribe was chosen to go to war (12 total). Phinehas the priest accompanied them with the holy articles and signal trumpets. They successfully killed all the males and kings. Vs. 8, they also killed Balaam with the sword (note he is in Midian, not where he was originally hired). They took the women and children captive along with the spoils. Moses was angry because they spared the women. He orders every male child and every woman who had known a man to be killed, REMINDING them of why they were destroying this nation (the idolatry that involved women). There was some purifying rituals for both the men and their objects. They were then instructed to divide the plunder. Everything was numbered and the booty divided into 2 piles. For the men of war, one of every 500 was to be given to Eleazar for the priesthood. For the men who stayed home, one of 50 was to be given to Eleazar for the priesthood. The numbers of what they took is recorded – 675,000 sheep, 61,000 donkeys, 72,000 oxen and 32,000 virgin girls. (NOTE: This gives us an idea of the magnitude of the army they defeated.
Vs. 48-54 – the offers then came to Moses and noted that they took a count of the men of war and not one was missing (the battle was 100% in favor of Israel). So they gave an extra offering of gold to Eleazar “to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD” (vs. 50).
 - i. **Inheriting the land east of the Jordan** – Numbers 32 - Following these battles, the tribe of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh requested that they be given the land they had conquered east of the Jordan, in place of land in Canaan. Moses and the leaders are concerned that they

would not follow YHWH and thus discourage the people because of the wars they were about to fight. The men of the eastern tribes said that they would go to war with the rest of Israel and then return when the land was conquered. Vs. 18, they promise they will not return home until every tribe receives its inheritance. So they are granted their request and they begin to (further) settle the land there.

- j. **The rest of numbers records** – 33 – a review of the various places they traveled while in the wilderness (from Egypt to the plains of Moab). Ch. 34 records describes their appointed boundaries when they inherit Canaan. Ch. 35 records cities of the Levites and 6 cities of refuge to be appointed – each within a days travel distance. The city was designated for one who ACCIDENTALLY killed another.
- k. **This brings us to the conclusion of events for this lesson.** In our next lesson we will notice the farewell address of Moses.

II. Lessons to consider

- a. Balaam, an example of what greed will do. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 reminds us of what happens to those who desire to be rich. Balaam is mentioned 3 times in the New Testament (not too long ago, we addressed this) – 2 Peter 2:15-16, Jude 11 and Revelation 2:14. ALL are associated with his greed. In *Revelation, we learn that Balaam was behind the harlotry of Israel at Acacia Grove.*
- b. You cannot defeat God's will – Balaam thought he could outsmart God and ultimately lost. His scheming resulted in a plague that killed 24,000, the destruction of Midian and Moab, and his death. Men have tried to thwart God's plans in many different ways. But He is still in charge and we are still here! His word still stands – 1 Peter 1:24-25. Proverbs 19:21, *There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand.*
- c. When God says, "no", we need to respect His will! After the first appearance of Balak's nobles, everything was well. It should have ended there! But Balaam kept going and his true character was revealed. One might ask, why did YHWH tell Balaam to go the 2nd time he asked and then became angry. I describe that as a test. He knew that YHWH did not really want him to go (he didn't even need to ask the 2nd time or 3rd time after the conversation with a donkey). **Would we fail that test?**
- d. When God speaks through a prophet it is His word. The prophet has no power to change it. Even corrupt Balaam could not change YHWH's word. He said so at least 4 times (Num. 22:18, 22:38, 23:26, 24:13). Recall 2 Peter 1:19-21. The point: **We can have confidence that what we have IS God's word to us!**
- e. Are you zealous for God? This is in no way advocating acting as Phinehas did. But he was commended for his strong action on behalf of YHWH. Recall when Jesus drove out the money changers (likely twice – John 2:13-17, Matthew 21:12-13). Titus 2:14 describes that God purified us, "his own special people, zealous for good works). **BUT, what will your zeal for God prompt you to do for Him?** Will you stand up for Him when it is politically incorrect or there are material consequences? Will you give up activities stand in your way of serving Him (even if they are not wrong within themselves)? Will you practice discipline as outlined in scripture, even when it is painful? Etc.
- f. IF God be for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31. Recall when the people numbered the soldiers after defeating Midian and not one was lost. That shows the power of God. Our plight may not turn out that successful but let us NEVER forget who is really in control (cf. 1 John 4:4).

And thus, we learn more lessons from Israel wandering in the wilderness. While we are in our wilderness wanderings, are we living so that we can cross over into His promised land – heaven?