

Preparing for The Promised Land
Numbers 28-36
February 26, 2012

Next Week: Deuteronomy 1-3

Proverb: 28:16. "A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life."

Wesley's Questions for Class Meetings. #7. "Do I give it [the Bible] time to speak to me everyday?"

What does the Bible Mean?

Chapters 28 and 29 include a systematic program of sacrifices that Israel is to offer in the land of Canaan. Until the destruction of the second Temple in A.D. 70, animal and other sacrifices were the dominant element of the Hebrew religion.

Read. Numbers 28:1-2

The scripture outlines *types* of offerings.

- Gifts as if to a king to advance a plea or seek a favor.
- Tributary (first fruits and tithes)
- Votive offerings regarding a vow either when a vow is made or later when the request was granted.
- Thanksgiving offerings to acknowledge divine favors.

As mentioned above, offerings were the dominant religious practice for the Hebrews. Do we appreciate the material as an expression of the spiritual? The spiritual can be enhanced by material expression. When we contemplate giving, we are encouraged to give material gifts (as well as time and service) in response to our blessings (both spiritual and material). Our faith experience might be more meaningful if we put more emphasis on *costly* offerings to God.

Questions.

What can be our daily reminders of what God has done for us?

What do our actions do for ourselves and for God?

There were also *occasion* offerings for feasts and festivals and special days as well as daily, weekly and monthly offerings. It is well to remind ourselves of some of the prominent feasts and festivals. We will encounter them throughout the Bible.

- The *Day of Atonement*. The great annual feast day of Judaism in which the High Priest entered the holy of holies to atone for the sins of all Israel. The day is now known as *Yom Kippur*.
- The *Feast of Booths* was one of the three great festivals and was held in the fall to celebrate the harvest. It was a time of in-gathering when people came from afar to celebrate.
- *Passover* and the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* was the first of the three major feasts on the liturgical calendar. The feast celebrated deliverance from Egypt.

- The *Festival of Weeks* which was the second of the three great festivals. It is also known as the *Feast of Harvest* and Pentecost.
- *The Festival of Trumpets* was celebrated the first day of the seventh month or *New Years Day* or *Rosh Hashanah*.

Questions.

What does the Passover meal mean to us? 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast.

The Israelites were encouraged to give their “first fruits.” Do we give our “firsts” or our “lasts?”

The Festival of Trumpets is a time of praise. How do we praise God?

During our lives, does God more often speak in times of feasts or “least” times?

Chapter 30 deals with the vows of women. Women were responsible for their vows *unless* the vow was disavowed by their husband or father.

Questions.

How do breaches of promise discredit our families, banking system and society itself?

Do we ever make promises “with our fingers crossed?”

Read. Numbers 31: 1-6

In Chapter 25, the Midianite women had deceived the Israelite men to seek the gods of Midian. God now commands Moses to attack the Midianites to revenge the deception. The priests and the holy objects are involved and used and this will be a holy war. God will fight with the people against the common enemy. A portion of the booty will go to the priests.

Every Midianite man was killed including five kings and the prophet Balaam who was seen to have incited the Midianite women to corrupt the Israelites.

All the Midianite men were killed but the women and children were taken captive. That made Moses and Eleazar angry. Moses ordered that the male children and all the females who had slept with a man be killed.

The warriors who had killed someone or who had touched a body had to stay outside the camp for seven days and their articles had to be purified.

The spoil was divided equally between warriors and those who stayed home as a symbol of solidarity. God was to receive one fifth of one percent of the warriors' share and the Levites were to receive two percent of the civilians' share. There were no Israelite casualties in the conflict.

The military leaders brought the gold and armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and beads to the Lord to make atonement for themselves. The gifts weighed about 420 pounds. Moses and the priests accepted the gifts as a memorial before the Lord.

Questions.

Which gifts give greater joy to God and the giver? ... assessed gifts or voluntary gifts.

Do we share our triumphs with God? How?

If life is God's gift to us, what are we doing with the gift?

Chapter 32 concerns the tribes of Gad and Reuben. They had large herds of livestock and they saw that the defeated land was suitable for livestock. They asked Moses if they could have the land as their inheritance. Moses asked, "Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here?" He noted that years before the men had viewed the Promised Land but had discouraged the people from taking it. Is this what they intended now?

Moses' question lingers today. Should one go to war while another stays home in safety?

There was conversation. The tribes of Gad and Reuben would take the land, but the men would cross the Jordan and help take the land until it was secure.

The chapter ends with Moses giving the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites to the children of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, the son of Joseph. The tribes took the land and rebuilt and fortified it. They became the "Transjordan" Tribes.

Questions.

Moses feared that Gad and Reuben would become isolated from their brothers. Today are our churches "isolated" from one another? Is there a danger in that? Are willing to go to bat to help others even when our "turf" is not at stake?

Read, Numbers 33:1-2; 50-59

Chapter 33 is a chronicle of the journey of the Israelites under Moses and Aaron from Egypt to across the Jordan from Canaan. If the movements in Moab are omitted, there were forty stages, eleven on the way to Sinai, twenty-one to Kadesh and eight to Moab. Many of the places are now unidentifiable and some well-known places are omitted but may appear as alternative names. We cannot identify the list as an itinerary. It outlines only the general tradition of a wandering from Egypt in the direction of Canaan.

We can identify our life walks with the desert experience. We set out and encamp and that becomes a stopping place which identifies our next starting place. We need to take care where we stop and begin again. The parts finally identify the whole and we'll be blessed if the final place is our Promised Land! Does thinking of our lives as a wandering, desert experience help us better understand the meaning of the growth of our spiritual lives?

The people are to enter the land and drive out all the people and destroy all stones, images and high places (sanctuaries) for the worship of local gods. God has given Israel the land to possess. It belongs to him. There is no need any more to offer sacrifices to gods who have no power.

The land is to be allotted by lot and according to size to the tribes. If the Canaanites are not totally expelled, they will become "barbs to your eyes and thorns in your sides". Then, "... I will do to you what I plan to do to them." They didn't and God eventually did!

Read. Numbers 34:1-2

In Chapter 34, God instructs Moses to tell the people that when they enter Canaan, the land will

become their inheritance. He defines the boundaries which are from the south in the desert of Zin to the west the Mediterranean Sea, to the north Mount Hor and to the east a line east of the Jordan to the Dead Sea. The land is to be divided among nine and one-half tribes as the tribes of Reuben, Gad and one-half of Manasseh had already received their allocations. The allocation will be made by named leaders from each tribe including Caleb and under the direction of Joshua and Eleazar in place of Moses and Aaron.

Once again, the names of the leaders make plain that God is with them. *Shemuel* means “name of God”; *Elidad*, “God has loved”; *Bukki*, “proved by God”; *Hanniel*, “favor of God”; *Kemuel*, “raised by God”; *Elizaphan*, “my God protects”; *Palatiel*, “God is my deliverance”; *Ahihud*, “brother of majesty” and *Pedahel*, “God has delivered”.

Questions.

Allocation of the land was an administrative issue. Do administrative issues affect fellowship and factions and the mission of the church? Can we help with unmet administrative issues?

Read. Numbers 35: 1-3

From the land allocated to the tribes will be cities for the Levites with surrounding lands to pasture their herds and flocks.

Six towns were to be designated (in Deuteronomy by Joshua, three on the east of Jordan and three on the west of Jordan) as towns of refuge for people who kill another *without intent*. The person had sanctuary from an avenger. The sanctuary lasts until the killer stands trial before the congregation. Two witness are necessary to convict. Remember this in the trial of Jesus where there was but one “witness.” Some forty-two other towns were given to the Levites – forty-eight towns in all.

Murder was defined versus accident. Use of a stone weapon or wooden weapon or premeditation, for example, would signify murderous intent. The accidental slayer is protected in the refuge until the death of the High Priest. The slayer was then free to go home.

Murder is considered significant enough that no ransom may be paid. Murder pollutes the land. The pollution can only be removed by the blood of the murderer. A murder not dealt with leaves the land which belongs to God and in which God dwells, polluted.

Chapter 36, supplements Chapter 27, in which it was determined that the daughters of Zelophehad who had no sons could inherit their father's estate. The family of Gilead observed that if the daughters married outside the clan, the lands would be lost to the outsider husbands. It was agreed that the daughters must marry their kinsmen in order to inherit the father' estate and they did!

Read. Number 36: 13

The commands and regulations of the Lord through Moses were confirmed and validated.

Question. Think back. Are there any laws you would like to see clarified?