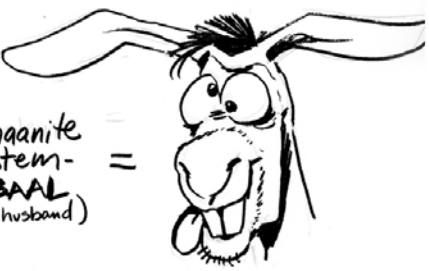


Numbers
Week 2/
Deuteronomy

NUMBERS 22-36
Preparing to Enter
the PROMISE



ch. 22-24

Balaam = Canaanite
system-
BAAL
(lord, husband)

ch. 28-29
A Process
of Purification

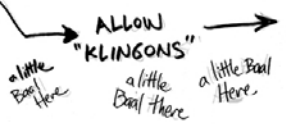


ch. 33

IF



EXPERIENCE THE
KINGDOM



BE AN
ADULTRESS/HARLOT
LOSE THE KINGDOM

Monday: Numbers 24-26
Tuesday: Numbers 27-31
Wednesday: Numbers 32-33
Thursday: Numbers 34-36
Friday: Deuteronomy 1-4

Introduction

The introduction to last week's devotional gave you the "spirit" of Numbers. At one level it could be considered a depressing book because we see the rebelliousness and the subsequent punishment of the nation. Yet, we can learn some great lessons from these stories about the importance of maintaining a focused, obedient relationship with God as the highest priority of life.

This week our introduction will more factual, giving you the general overview of the book.

There are three major sections to the book of Numbers:

Part 1: Preparing to Move:

Preparing to Claim the Promised Land (ch. 1-10)

In this section the Lord instructs Moses to prepare the nation to move away from Mt. Sinai by counting the people, organizing the placement of each tribe in the marching order, and giving final directions for purity.

Part 2: Failing to Believe: Lack of Faith earns a 40 year walk in the desert (10-25)

In 10:11 the cloud finally lifts and begins leading the people toward their promised destination -- the land of Canaan. In these 15 chapters we read a narrative that describes...

- ☀ people complaining and God sending fire
- ☀ Miriam and Aaron rebelling against Moses
- ☀ 12 spies scouting the land and 10 saying, "We can't do it."
- ☀ The generation being cut off from the land and forced to wander for 40 years
- ☀ a rebellion against Moses swallowed up in the Earth
- ☀ Moses' and Aaron dishonor God and are denied entrance into the land
- ☀ a plague of serpents to punish the rebellious people
- ☀ a big battle with Sihon and Og
- ☀ The blessings of Balaam
- ☀ immorality in Moab

Part 3: Trying Again: Preparing the Next Generation to Claim the Promised Land (ch. 26-36)

In chapter 26 it is as if the book of Numbers starts over. The rebellious generation has died off, just as God promised they would. It is now 40 years later and the next generation is standing in front of a very old Moses, waiting to receive instructions before they invade Canaan.

Two important things happen:

1. Joshua is appointed as the new leader to replace Moses.
2. Moses reconnects the people to the basics of the Law and instructs them on what to do with the land once they take possession of it.

Monday: The Confusing Story of Balaam

Numbers 22-24

The story of Balaam raises many questions. We could spend pages trying to sort through them. Here are some observations from the Balaam story.

1. **There was God outside of Israel.** When we read through the books of Moses it is very easy to think that the whole story of the universe is wrapped up in the story of the Exodus. In other words, it is easy to think that God established the Law as a universal law for all people, at all times, and that it is only through the observance of this law that one can possibly interact with God.

Then we meet Balaam. He is much like Melchizedek, whom we met back in Genesis. Both of these men had a direct and intimate relationship with God. God spoke to them just as he spoke to Moses. And yet, neither of them were Israelites. Neither of them worshipped at the tabernacle or observed the law.

Why is this important? Too many times we limit God to the box that He has built for us. Yes, the law was limiting and restrictive. But the limits were not for God, they were for the people. Israel was an infantile nation riddled with fear, bitterness, grumbling, and treacherous tendencies. As a loving father, God had to impose harsh boundaries on them until they grew up.

But that was God's deal with Israel. We tend to forget that there were Balaams and Melchizedeks all over the planet. Just because God was leading the Israelites out of Egypt doesn't mean he was forsaking all other people on Earth. God deals with everyone, all the

time. He'll interact with anyone who honestly wants to reach out to Him. Even if they don't look like us, or follow our rules.

That is still true today. Over the centuries Christianity has become little less than a bunch of rules and cultural mores that restrict human behavior. The traditions are not in themselves, but they tend to foster a spirit of superiority and/or hostility toward the Balaams and Melchizedeks of our time.

Let's be careful how we treat others who have a relationship with God that looks different than ours.

2. God can speak through a donkey. Hey, if God can use a donkey, then most of us who write or teach are in good company! Enough said.

Tuesday: A Pattern of Worship


Numbers 28-29

As you read through these chapters, create a chart that shows the frequency of the offerings that were to be made. Do you see a pattern?


Food for thought:


We have discussed this point once before in the devotionals when we were studying Leviticus. As with all core truths, repetition is a good thing. There are two observations that can be made from these two chapters.

A relationship with God and with others requires sacrifice. We must not forget that core truth. Of course, in our day, we are not referring to the blood bath of killing animals, rather, it is because of Jesus' final sacrifice of Himself that we are free from the system of animal sacrifice. Yet, when Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God and lifted the external code of Moses, He did not set us free to run around under our own libertarian indulgences. Quite the contrary. When Jesus proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, He intensified the Law of Moses and transferred it from the external law of ritual washings and animal sacrifice to the internal law of the heart, demanding the sacrifice of self from the citizens of the Kingdom. If we are going to have a right relationship with God and with each other, then we are going to have to sacrifice our own selfish ambition and self-serving desires on the altar. We are going to have to be willing to say, "Father, this is YOUR kingdom and I am your servant, I am your child. What would YOU like me to do today?" The frequency and pattern of sacrifice is significant. Notice how the pattern works.

 God calls for a *daily sacrifice*. Every day we should get up...and die. When your eyes open in the morning your thoughts should be, "Good morning, Lord? How can I serve you today?" For most of us, the typical first thought of the day is, "Oh Lord, its morning! How can I get 5 more minutes of sleep?"

If we will set aside time each day, as a spiritual discipline, to clear our minds, confess our sin, soak in God's Word, and be filled with His Spirit -- sacrificing ourselves on the altar -- then we will be able to overflow all day with the grace and the Kingdom of God.

 **Weekly Sabbaths.** Once a week it is important to observe a Sabbath day in community. One of the biggest traps of our society is to believe that our spiritual life is a private affair between us and God. This is not true. We were created to be in community. The two major purposes for the Sabbath were to 1) create space for the individual -- regardless of social status -- to experience rest and re-creation; to create balance in the hectic pace of life. 2) to create space for community to happen among the people of God. God knew that, left to our own devices, we would tend to fill our lives with busy-ness and view people as objects to be manipulated for our personal ends. With the creation of a community Sabbath, everyone can come together on equal ground, with no time pressures, take a deep breath, and begin the awkward process of getting to know one another. This is why the letter to the Hebrews says, *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* (Hebrews 10:25)

 **Seasonal Celebrations.** God knew that humans need variety. When life becomes monotonous we can tend to drift into apathy. God created the year with seasons. There are seasons of intense work and there are seasons of rest and contemplation. Peppered throughout the year there are special celebrations that keep us connected to the key historical events that define our communal

identity. As Christians we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. In the spring we celebrate both the Passover and the Resurrection of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, at Easter. Throughout the year there are special days, like Thanksgiving, to stop, reflect, and celebrate. Don't underestimate the significance of these special celebrations.

Evaluate your own schedule and see if your offerings are taking precedent as "big rocks" or "A-1" events in your life. Or, are these the optional, squeeze-them-in-when-you-have-a-chance activities. This pattern of offerings is not intended to be an oppressive burden of "have to or else" legalism. The purpose of these offerings is to give us a support structure of activities that will create adequate space in our lives to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in us and cultivate the growth of the Kingdom of God in our hearts.

Wednesday: What Goes Around

Numbers 32:20-24; Numbers 33:50-56

What did the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh want to do?

In what way was this outside the original plan of God?

What was Moses' response to this request?

What conditions were set on their request?

What warning was given in v. 23-24?

In 33:50-56, what instructions does Moses give the people?

What warning does he give them?

Food for Thought:

We live in an age where popular Christianity has emphasized the grace, love, forgiveness, and “fun” aspects of God. Hey, why not? God is gracious, loving, forgiving, and “fun.” Yet, we need to be careful about painting a caricature of God and reducing Him to a “right jolly old elf.” God is the almighty creator of the universe. He is Holy and hates sin. He punishes evil.

If you track through the pages of church history you will notice the pendulum swing regarding the emphasis that the church places on God’s love vs. God’s justice. The current “kinder, gentler” God image is a reactionary movement to the rigid, hypocritical, and condemning spirit of fundamentalism at the turn of the 20th century. Fundamentalism was a reactionary movement to the rationalistic liberalism of the 19th century that reduced the gospel to nothing more than being loving through social action.

As we read through the entire Bible it will serve us well to explore and keep in balance both sides of God’s nature. Today we will look at the side of God that is probably more uncomfortable for most of us. Nobody likes to be “guilted” into doing good. Most of us have been manipulated too many times by overbearing, hypocritical, judges. While it is a sad reality that this type of brow-beating does take place, that does not excuse us from the truth of scripture. Our focus today is the phrase in v. 23, “*you may be sure that your sin will find you out.*” Moses warns the people to not trifle with God and say they are going to do one thing and then do another. God is not some peasant that can be used for one’s own gain and then be discarded. While we would probably never admit

openly that that we think we can “pull one over on God” or that we can sneak a little sin in here and there and God won’t notice, many times our actual behavior demonstrates that this is, indeed, what we believe. We think we can just skirt along the edges of God’s will and perfect standard and pretend that He does not notice the selfish motives behind our quasi-spiritual activity. Don’t be fooled. God knows your motives better than you do.

Is it time to come clean and let God look into the deepest, darkest corners of your life and get those nasty little cobwebs out?

Spend some time meditating on the following verses and ask God to shine the light of truth and justice into your soul today.

Genesis 4:6-7

Exodus 34:6-7

1 Corinthians 4:5

Hebrews 4:12-13

Thursday: Cities of Refuge

Numbers 35

What was to be given to the Levites? (vv.1-5)

What was the purpose of the cities of refuge?

When was the penalty lifted?

Food for Thought:

Here at the close of the book of Numbers the Israelites are gathering at the east bank of the Jordan River, getting ready to storm into Canaan, conquer the inhabitants, and take over the land that God had promised to Abraham many centuries earlier. The men were gearing up for battle, conquest, and settlement. One of the many purposes for the books of Moses was to instruct the people as to the geographical distribution of the tribes. In other words, it was a real estate guide, divvying up the land to each of the tribes of Israel.

Each one got a piece of the pie. Each one, that is, except for the Levites. Remember, in Exodus the Levites were set aside as the priestly tribe. They were not allowed to own land. They were dedicated to the Lord and were set apart to facilitate the Israelites' worship of God. In this chapter we see that the Levites were sprinkled throughout the tribes of Israel, much like one would sprinkle salt all around one's dish of food. Hmm....salt.

There are some observations and applications we can make from this chapter:

The priests of God were sprinkled like salt throughout the nation. Peter tells us that we, as followers of Jesus, are a royal priesthood. The church is like the tribe of Levi in the world. We are to 1) not consider the land our possession, we are just strangers and sojourners in it, 2) infiltrate the culture and be present "in it, but not of it" (John 17:15-19) in order to be "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13-16) in the world. God distributed the Levites throughout the nation because He knew that without the presence of the priests in their midst, the nation would be tempted to follow the idol-worshipping nations around them. The hope of

the world is the church scattered throughout it. It is the presence of God-focused, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled Christians in the midst of pagan worldviews that will slow the rate of decay and be a conduit of hope to the lost and dying world.

One of the purposes of the Levitical cities was to protect people from their own sinfulness. They were to be a haven of refuge. Notice an important piece of the instructions regarding the city of refuge...if a person was guilty of intentional murder, then they deserved to be punished. However, if a person did something stupid and it ended up in a terrible result, like death, then the offender needed a place of refuge. The avenger of blood was hot on his heels and he needed a place to hide out, be safe, regroup, repent, and wait for the day of deliverance. When the high priest died then the killer could be released from the bondage of guilt and allowed to return to a normal life.

Let's draw an analogy from this for the church. If Christians are like the Levites, being the royal priesthood, and are sprinkled throughout the world like salt, then one aspect of the function of the church is that it should be a city of refuge for the spiritual refugee. We live in a world where people are being spun around so fast by the whirlwind of sinfulness in our dominant culture that people are hurting each other and themselves needlessly, "innocently" all the time. That is not to say that people are "innocent" and not responsible for their actions. It is to say that the majority of sinners are such because of the dominant influence of evil in the world. These lost souls need a place where they will be welcomed in and sheltered from their great accuser, the avenger of blood, their enemy, Satan, and allowed to heal. When the high priest dies, then their sin will be forgiven and they can be set free.

Guess what...the high priest died. When Jesus died
He set the captive free.

As the church, let us consider how each meeting place could consider itself a city of refuge for the people in its surrounding neighborhood. As we gather each week to worship God, we are like the Levites, shining the light of God's truth. People in the immediate vicinity should be able to detect that something is going on. Through our prayers and our intentional relational outreach, they should be able to smell the joy and hope that comes from that church. If our churches would view themselves as little outposts of the Kingdom of God in our neighborhoods, then we can serve as cities of refuge for the sinner to enter and be healed.

Friday: Looking Back, Moving Forward

Deuteronomy 1-4

Where is Moses when he begins to preach the sermon of Deuteronomy? (1:1)

When does Moses preach this sermon? (1:3-4)

As you read through chapters 1-3, notice that Moses is recapping the past 40 years of Israel's history. Sketch a little timeline of how Moses retells the story and see how well you can track with it.

What are Moses' instructions to the people...
in 4:9?

in vv. 15-20?

What is Moses warning in vv. 25-31?

Food for thought:

Here are three thoughts for today:

1. It is a healthy exercise to periodically set aside time to look backward and see what God has done. One of the best ways to do this is to incorporate the spiritual discipline of journaling into your life. If you will spend part of your daily quiet time with God writing down your prayers, thoughts, feelings, interactions with God, interactions with others, and evidences of God at work in your life, it will serve you well in the future. At least once a year, it is healthy to sit down and review this chronicle of your spiritual journey. When we review the ways in which God has worked in our life it can be a great source of conviction and encouragement. We can be reminded of the spiritual trajectory that God has set us on and set a course to either continue in the same direction or to alter course because we realize we have drifted.
2. It is important that we never lose our focus. Moses knew that the nation of Israel was about to transition into a radically different phase of their existence. He knew that the allure of the fertile lands, the riches, and the sensual worship practices of the Canaanites would serve as intense distractions to the sole purpose of the nation. In this final sermon by Moses we hear the intensity in his voice as he tries to connect the people to their source of life. God was the only source of life for the people. God had given the people the detailed instruction of the Law to keep them focused on the goal and not be distracted by sin. We, too, must never

forget that it is all about God. If anything, no matter how “good” it may seem, gets in the way of our growing relationship with God, then it is a distraction and needs to be removed from our lives.

3. In 4:15-20 we are reminded that God has no form. There is nothing that can adequately describe the nature of God. We often speak of God’s face, or His loving arms, but we must remember that this is simply figurative language. God does not have a face. God does not have arms. God is infinite spirit. He is not a being like you and me. He is the source of all being. He is beyond comparison. This passage may seem to be outdated to our 21st century perspective since we do not worship idols. Yet, it is very appropriate for us because we make idols every day. Every time we place a limitation on God and say that, “God MUST do this,” or “God CAN’T do this,” we are carving a stone image of Him. Anytime we create a religious system and say that this particular system is THE ONLY RIGHT WAY to worship God, we have carved a statue of wood and are bowing down to it. Now, before I am misinterpreted as buying into the “all roads lead to God” heresy, let me say that...well... I’m not saying that. There is only one true God. God has objectively revealed Himself through scripture. Now, get this...scripture is a completely **accurate** description of God, BUT scripture is not a complete **description** of God. That would be impossible. No amount of scripture could contain enough words to adequately describe the nature of God.

Think of it this way. With God, we are on a need to know basis. He is the creator,

we are the creation. We were created for His purposes, we don't create Him for our purposes. Therein lies the heart of today's message. As soon as we start creating a conception of God that serves OUR agenda, then we are sliding down the slippery slope of idolatry just like Moses warned the Israelites not to do.

Ask God to examine the temple of your heart today. Are there any idols that have been carved to look like your own desires? If there are, get rid of them. Ask God to smash them.

We must keep our focus on the infinite, indescribable, mysterious, loving God that made us and loves us and has a plan for our lives. His Kingdom come, His will be done!