

NUMBERS

Lesson 30 - Chapters 27 and 28

The last time we met we looked at the 2nd census of Numbers. There was a census of Israel taken not long after they left Egypt; and now, nearly 40 years later another census was taken because Israel was about to begin the conquest of Canaan.

In both cases the Levites were considered as a separate category, and so had a separate census from the other tribes of Israel. The terms and conditions of the census (who was counted and who was not) for the Israelites versus the census for the Levites were also different in one significant way: the age of the males who were included in the census.

The regular Israelite males (the 12 tribes) were included in the count if they were of an appropriate age to fight in the military, and so were older men but not SO old as to be physically unable to contribute in some way to the war effort. In general, the age range counted was 20 to 50.

For the Levites, however, the age range counted in the census was from one month of age and up. There was no upper limit, and the age of one month as the young-side of the range was chosen primarily due to Hebrew law that a male child was not counted as "a person" until they had lived for 1 full cycle of the moon after their birth. This does NOT mean that newborns were considered sub-human or unimportant. Rather, it is that until a male had been circumcised (usually on the 8th day after birth), and had managed to survive for 30 days, they were not to be considered part of Israel. This had to do with the rather significant infant mortality rate of that era more than anything else.

The reason for the first census, some 40 years earlier, was to establish an army of Israelites and to establish a priesthood of Levites. The new census was for determining the size of the territory each tribe would be allotted. Overlooked, however, is yet another need for this census: much had changed in the 40 years since Israel left Egypt. There had been a near 100% population turnover; the Lord had decreed that those who were of an age of accountability when they left the grip of Pharaoh would never be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The reason for this severe restriction was Israel's rebellion at Kadesh when the 12 scouts reconnoitered Canaan and came back with a report that it would very costly in terms of human life in order for Israel to conquer Canaan. The result was that the leaders and the general population of Israel became afraid and refused to enter the Land of Canaan. Two scouts spoke in opposition to the reluctant 10, and those two scouts (Joshua and Caleb) were made an exception to the rule by being allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

So a detailed accounting of the census was recorded, wherein we find the overall structure of Israel changed somewhat. Some tribes grew in population, others decreased. One tribe, Simeon, was at this time less than half the size it was when they left Egypt. And this was at least partly due to the fulfillment of the curse that Simeon's father, Jacob, had laid on both Simeon and Levi in his deathbed pronouncements.

Individual clans and their leaders are called out so as to record who belonged to which clan, and then which clan to which tribe; this family connection was everything when it came to apportioning the land. While Moses apportioned land to each tribal leader, the tribal leader then apportioned his piece among the clans of his tribe. The larger and more prominent clans received more (and better) land holdings than the smaller and weaker clans.

So one could say that most of what we studied last week revolved around the land inheritance Israel was about to receive. What we'll read in Numbers chapter 27 are some laws that better define the laws of SUCCESSION of that land inheritance; that is, how is the land passed on when a clan or family leader dies.

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When we back away and take a high-altitude view of the Law, we find that after a series of general laws in Exodus and Leviticus, Numbers and later Deuteronomy tend to deal with some specific cases that don't fit well within the general rules and regulations. So while one could, in the most negative sense, say a law has been changed from Leviticus to Numbers, in fact a law is merely being either more specifically defined, or how a law is to be carried out is being explained in more depth. And in some cases because the generation who was given the Law at Mt. Sinai is now dead and gone the more important laws and principles are being repeated and reinforced for the new generation of Hebrew whose parents had first received the Law but they were now buried in the desert sands.

And the first thing we encounter is a case whereby a family headed by a man named Zelophehad, now deceased, has a problem; and that problem is that Zelophehad left no sons to inherit so his daughters come to Moses and ask why it would be so wrong for THEM to inherit their father's wealth, even though they weren't males. Their reasoning is stated in verses 3 and 4; and in a nutshell it is that a) their father had NOT participated in the great apostasy of Korah (when a fire came out of the Tabernacle and burned up many rebellious men, and an earthquake opened up a fissure which swallowed thousands of people.....families of the rebels); and b) their father had died under the same curse that all the other people who left Egypt had (they failed to trust the Lord and go forth into the Promised Land). Further, since all the other families whose men had committed the same sin were not being denied rights to land in Canaan, why should their father's family be denied land merely because he had no sons to inherit his portion?

Moses listens to the plea of these women and says he will take the case before the Lord. If we look closely, after Mt. Sinai this sort of method of having additional laws added became normal. And the same concept is used to this day in our American legal system; it's called precedent. A situation would arise (without previous precedent) and it would be brought to

Moses, the judge, to decide. He would then take it to the Lord who would decide the matter. Moses would inform the parties of Yehoveh's decision and THEN the matter became law based on precedent. Generally speaking, all similar matters were to be handled in the same way in the future. Therefore we have generally two classifications and methods of receiving laws from Yehoveh: by oracle (like on Mt. Sinai), and by precedent when a situation demands a remedy and so is taken to YHWH and He decides it.

As to the concept of a family leader dying and there being only daughters and no sons to inherit, the Lord says that daughters MAY inherit what would normally have been given to the sons. And the Lord then takes some additional obvious and probably quite usual cases regarding succession of inheritance and makes them law as well. If a father dies without a son, his wealth goes to his daughters. If that man has no children at all, it goes to his own brothers. If he has no brothers at all, it goes to his uncles on his father's side. If the man didn't even have uncles on his father's side, then the nearest family relative whether on the mother's or the father's side will inherit the family property.

Now a little later in Numbers, and later still in Deuteronomy, we will get some caveats and exceptions to all this because the basic principle that this revolves around is that land was not ever to leave the possession of the Hebrew family who originally possessed it. I am avoiding using the word "owned" (by using the word "possessed") because God makes it clear that ALL the land of Canaan, soon to be called Israel, is HIS. Even the Israelites won't be "owning" the land per se; they'll just possess it. The best mental picture of this arrangement in modern terms would be the difference between buying a house and leasing it. In one case the title of the land and dwelling belongs to you, in the other you simply possess the property for the purpose of using it, by paying something to the owner. Ownership has no expiration date; leases are time limited. God was not passing the title of the property to Israel; He was but giving the Hebrews EXCLUSIVE use of the property in perpetuity. Therefore since one cannot sell what one does not own, the Israelites had no right to sell land in Israel especially to foreigners; and strictly speaking not even to each other. And the laws of Sabbatical years and (more directly) the laws of Jubilee facilitated this idea of possessing someone else's land for a time but never owing it. The Promised Land did not have for sale sign on it.

Now this would be a good time to make something quite clear given the events of our time whereby Israel is actively engaged in giving up land in hopes of peace with their enemies. Or from a biblical perspective, actively engaged in rebelling against the Lord by giving up possession of land that was set-aside exclusively for them by Yehoveh. Those of us who are supporters of Israel watch hurt, angry and frustrated at the wrong-minded and foolish attempt of the Israeli government to appease their enemies by giving up God's land to His enemies. Their hope is that by giving up that land their enemies will give them peace in return. Yet, inexplicably, the more land they give up, the more their enemies attack them. Only a couple of years ago Israel gave up that southern seacoast portion called the Gaza Strip and almost immediately Israel came under rocket attack from Gaza. Now they are being threatened with attack from enemies of the north who are demanding that they give up the northern portion of Israel. And why not? It worked for the Palestinians.

I suppose it would be reasonable to draw the conclusion that all Israel has done by once again

giving up land for peace is emboldening their enemies to demand more. And why they can't see that, I'm not sure. However that is but the earthly reality. The spiritual heavenly reality is that the Lord is at the least allowing Israel to pay a heavy price for rebelling against Him by giving up that which they don't own; the land of Israel. Israelis have no right (from a spiritual perspective) to hand one square inch of Israel over to ANYONE, especially to their enemies. But neither does our nation have the right to demand that the key to peace in the region is to do exactly that; which is precisely the centerpiece of the Bush administration's Roadmap to Peace. Divide Israel and create a Palestinian.....Philistine.....state on the Lord's land. Of all the possibilities, I can't think of a worse plan than that.

We've all gasped at one time or another when we read of the end times prophecy that says a new Temple will be built in Jerusalem, and then the Anti-Christ will put an image of himself inside the Holy of Holies and demand that he be worshipped as God. There really is little difference between inviting God's enemies to live on His sanctified land, and permitting God's GRAND enemy to be worshipped in His sanctified Temple; it's all cut from the same cloth.

So while we can empathize with Israel's current plight, and we can be for our President and loyal to our great country, as God's elect we can NOT applaud or be party to such a plan. In fact we need to oppose it energetically and not by offering some geo-political reason, or speaking of fairness or even of international law. Rather we must stand on the covenants of God that gave the Hebrews that land for all time; what manmade government bodies think matters not.

I went on this seeming detour because the very reason for the new procedure of establishing law by means of precedent (regarding land inheritance in this case) is the developing God-principle that land given to a certain Israelite family is to REMAIN in that family. That is the reason that wherever possible the land was to be passed on to a son because the son carried the family name forward. Daughters, when they married, became under the authority and identity and name of her husband's family; what happens if that daughter married a foreigner?

While some can look at this seeming sex discrimination made into law by the Lord, the reality is that daughters were provided for in a different way than sons. Daughters were given valuable dowries when they married. We have records of wealthy men even giving their daughters entire cities as wedding gifts. Now, of course, this all depended on how well off the father of the bride was. But it was the same for the son; for the average Israelite a couple of acres of ground and a handful of sheep were given as a wedding gift or at times is all there was to inherit. Perhaps some metal cooking containers or some tools of the father's trade might be inherited. There was only occasionally a great transfer of land and wealth.

When a daughter was married-off, the dowry ended any responsibility the father had for his daughter. She was now the responsibility of her new husband and HIS family.

If a daughter of a man of the tribe of Judah married a man from the tribe of Dan, she stopped being seen as a Judahite and became a Danite. More, if a daughter of a man from the tribe of Judah married a man OUTSIDE of any Israelite tribe, she made herself an outsider. So if a daughter of an Israelite man inherited her father's land, and then (by way of example)

proceeded to marry a man from the gentile nation of Moab, then you would have a non-Israelite taking possession of piece of the Holy Land; a definite no-no. Yet, as of this point in the Scripture that exact thing was a real possibility for there was nothing to prevent it. That is why later we'll find laws that the daughter only retains that inheritance as long as she marries within her own tribe. If she marries even another Hebrew, but not of her father's tribe, she is subject to having her inheritance voided under certain circumstances.

In verse 12 the subject of chapter 27 takes a sharp turn and we are given the story of how a new leader to replace Moses was selected. This was needed because a) Moses was a very old man and was well beyond being the leader of an army, and b) the Lord had determined that Moses (due to his sin of rebelling against God) would not be allowed to enter the land. However, Moses would, at least, be allowed to SEE it.

So we have Moses ascending a mountain in a range of mountains that at that time was called Abarim; and from there getting an expansive view of the Promised Land that he would never get to set foot upon. Later we'll find that this particular mountain is called Mt. Nebo. And the Lord says that shortly after Moses sees the land, he will die. Then in verse 15 this Mediator of Israel shows his heart for the people by asking the Lord to appoint a new leader so that the community of Israel can be cared for. And the person Yehoveh chooses is Joshua, son of Nun. Joshua is well qualified for the job because he has been Moses' assistant for quite some time. He also has great merit in the Lord's eyes because he was one of the two scouts who stood against the rest of Israel when they waffled and refused to trust God for victory over their enemies in the Promised Land.

While it sounds as though Moses will die immediately in fact it will be a little while yet before he passes. For there are yet many laws to give, and the land must be fairly allotted by Moses to each tribe. Let's notice an interesting difference between the death of Aaron the High Priest (Moses' big brother) and the subsequent automatic appointment of his son Eleazar as the new High Priest, versus the coming death of Moses and the subsequent NAMING of a new leader of Israel by the Lord.

First, Aaron didn't ask Yehoveh (as did Moses) for a replacement High Priest because the line of succession was set and automatic. Aaron's firstborn son (or another son if that firstborn was unsuitable for whatever reason) was to become the new High Priest, and this was to be the pattern from here forward for the High Priestly succession. However there was no automatic successor (no inheritor of the position) from Moses. Second, in fact, there was to be no real successor to Moses at all. Moses' most important role (as Mediator for Israel) was not passed on. Joshua was to be a military leader of Israel not a Mediator. When Moses needed answers from the Lord, or the Lord wanted to tell Moses something, Yehoveh made direct communication with Moses. This would not usually be so with Joshua. Joshua was NOT going to be the new Mediator of Israel.

I have mentioned before that the Lord has in all of history supplied but TWO Mediators, and 2 only. And that is all there ever will be. Moses was the first, Yeshua (Jesus Christ) the 2nd. Neither had a successor. Oh some of their duties were assigned; Joshua was to rule over, care for and lead Israel; and we Believers are to spread the Good News and demonstrate Christ's

sacrificial love. But we are not the replacement Mediators for Jesus, we are but His disciples. So with the coming death of Moses it would be around 12 centuries before the Father would provide a new and better Mediator than Moses. And now that Yeshua is dead and risen, there will not ever be another. When He comes again, it will not be as Mediator, but as the Kinsman Redeemer.

Further as we see in verse 18, Joshua is to be commissioned by the High Priest; Moses was commissioned by God (this is the protocol for anointing a Mediator). Actually Moses even commissioned the priesthood. Then in verse 20 we see that even while Moses is still alive Joshua is to receive some of Moses' authority. So we have a dual leadership that will go on for a short time: Moses and Joshua as a leadership team. Yet it is understood that Moses is the senior and therefore has authority over Joshua. So we see Moses lays his hands on Joshua. The Hebrew is **samak**, which means to "lean on". Latter the term becomes formalized to **samaka**, which directly means the ritual laying-on-of-hands.

Biblically, **samaka**, laying on hands, indicates a transference of some kind. Sometimes this transference is authority (like this between Moses and Joshua) and at other times it can be the transference of guilt or sin from a man to an animal. That is why virtually every animal sacrifice employed **samaka**. The whole purpose of animal sacrifice revolved around transference and substitution. So this laying on of hands was ritual symbolism and painted quite a picture of what would come with the advent of Yeshua.

This chapter ends with Moses and Joshua standing before Eleazar, the High Priest, and the whole community watching while Joshua is in essence ordained with authority. It is done before all the people so that all will recognize Joshua as God's choice, and will submit to his leadership.

Let's move on to chapter 28.

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Chapters 28 and 29 are effectively the Hebrew calendar of public sacrifices. That is, as we have discussed before, there are a number of kinds of calendar years in every society. In the US we have the secular calendar year, the school year, the fiscal year, and others. In Israel we have the secular calendar year, the ritual calendar year, the tithing calendar year, and others. What this chapter embellishes more than establishes is the religious ritual calendar year. I say embellishes because between Exodus and Leviticus most of what we read here has already been laid down as Law; however this section in chapters 28 and 29 tailors the rituals to the imminent time when Israel would be celebrating these sacrifices and feasts in their own land; and therefore they would have all the foods and animals and wine and such available to properly perform those rituals on a regular basis.

Sacrifice is at the heart of worship. Let me repeat that: SACRIFICE is at the heart of all biblically based worship. The Torah sacrifices are pictures and patterns that were to be taken literally and performed precisely; yet they are also prophetic of a time when Messiah would come to fulfill the purpose of those sacrifices.

Modern Christians generally have no understanding of biblical sacrifice. Part of that is because the Bible doesn't bother to explain the significance and purpose of each of the many kinds and categories of sacrifices that are so carefully laid out in the Law of Moses. Yet to the people of Moses' era and for a thousand years after him, the significance was self-evident. Those worshippers who brought the sacrifices, and those priests who officiated over the sacrifices, comprehended well both the broad picture of appeasing a God who was offended by the sin of His people; and they understood the detailed nuances of the many kinds of rituals that the Lord says are indispensable in His economy. The DOING of the sacrificial rituals automatically brought with it the understanding of WHY those rituals were needed. The followers of the Torah understood how expensive and bloody and painful atonement is. They understood that there are different levels of offending YHWH. They understood that there are some sins that cannot be atoned for with a substitute. They understood that sin and holiness are organically connected and multi-faceted. They understood that you could not separate your life from your faith; that could not behave one way 6 days of the week, and another on Sabbath. The idea that you would have one set of morals and ethics in business, another set in your home, and yet another set at synagogue was unknown to them.

Before we study chapter 28 verse-by-verse I would like to sum up the sacrificial rituals and celebrations that the Law prescribes. It's been a while since we've looked at them so this is a good chance to recall them.

There are 4 main categories of sacrifices ordained in the Torah: 1) the burnt offering, the **'Olah**; the purification offering, the **Hatta'at**; the reparation or guilt offering, the **'Asham**; and the peace offering, the **Shelamim**. It is the precise protocol of the ritual and the kinds of animals that are prescribed that defines and differentiates these offerings from one another. But there was one common cord that connected each of these categories of sacrifice: a worshipper would present the specified animal, lay hands on the animal, and then kill and butcher it according to set procedure. After that the priest would sprinkle some of the blood of that animal on the great Bronze Altar, and then some or all of the animal would be burnt up on the altar. All sacrifices were to be burned up, so all sacrifices could be said to be burnt offerings.

The disposition of the flesh of the animal played a significant role in the characteristics of each kind of sacrifice. The **'Olah** required that the entire animal was burnt up on the altar fire; therefore no one was permitted to eat any part of that kind of sacrifice. The **Hatta'at** and the **Asham** sacrifices allowed some of the animal to be used for food by the Temple priests. The **Shelamim** permitted specified parts of the animal to be burnt up on the Altar, other parts to be given as food to the priests, and usually the largest portion to the ordinary worshipper who brought the animal.

The **'Olah** was performed daily and routinely; it was the most often performed of all the sacrifices. It was the king of the sacrifices and generally considered the most important. The **Hatta'at** occurred often, and was usually associated with the ending of a long-term time of being unclean for one reason or another.

The **'Asham** was not nearly so often as the previous two and was set-apart as special because

it was part of the atonement process for one who committed a particularly serious sin such as blasphemy or adultery.

The **Shelamim** occurred frequently; it was often used at the completion of a vow. Sometimes this sacrifice is called a "free-will" sacrifice because one who simply wanted to honor the Lord for almost any reason could bring a **Shelamim** sacrifice at his or her own volition. That the worshipper got to keep a goodly portion of the meat had much to do with the high rate of its use. By law animals used for food were to be slaughtered at the Temple. By practicality only the wealthy enjoyed meat on a regular basis. So a common citizen who wanted meat usually waited for an occasion where a peace offering, a **Shelamim** sacrifice, was called for so he could satisfy both the law and his own desire for meat. The wealthy tended to make MANY **Shelamim** sacrifices because they wanted meat on the table almost daily. So the wealthy tended to look quite pious (and thus considered themselves more righteous than the poor) by offering all these peace offerings, even though their motive was a nice juicy lamb chop.

In every one of these sacrifices the sacrificial animal becomes the substitute for the owner of the animal. That is the animal dies in place of the one who brought it; the animal dies as ransom payment for the sins of the worshipper.

In the '**Olam** offering, the animal is completely burnt up and destroyed; it presents a picture of which each and every person on earth owes to the Lord for our sin. We owe Him our physical and eternal death.

The **Hatta'at** requires that the blood of the animal be smeared around the Altar. The purpose of that smeared blood is as a purifying agent. The Altar and all the ritual places and items become defiled because of the sins of men. The only thing that can purify is blood. Without the constant purifying of the Temple area, there would be no way that a holy God could live there.

Now, the '**Asham** offering is interesting in that it represents the payment of a debt. The blood of the animal, representing the life of the animal, is OWED to God due to the sins of the worshipper. This is reparation PAID to the Lord for our offense against Him.

The **Shelamim**, the peace offering, was a "thank you" gift to the Lord. It was normally presented when the giver was experiencing well being and wanted to acknowledge that it was Yehoveh who was the source of this well being; or as the name of the offering implies, that the worshipper was experiencing shalom (well being).

So as you can see, atonement and sin are large and complex matters. It may seem simple and straightforward to a gentile, in particular, who has no knowledge whatsoever of the sacrificial system. But the death of our Savior as a sacrifice of atonement was not simple. Our Father didn't reduce the complexity of sin and atonement when His Son died and then rose from the dead. It has been men's doctrines that seem to do everything possible to prevent us from even reading about God's laws and ordinances; men's doctrines that replace Scripture with overly simplistic statements such as "a sin is a sin, it doesn't matter what it is" (a common belief within the church). Or that our "sacrifice" is simply answering an altar call at a revival or a church service; going forward and saying yes to the call of Yeshua. Or worse that our deeds and

works have nothing to do with anything. Most certainly our deeds and works can never gain us salvation; but our deeds and works are with equal certainty a measure of our commitment to our Savior and to the eternal principles of Yehoveh.

We'll pick up with chapter 28 next week.