

NUMBERS

Lesson 34 - Chapters 32 and 33

When last we met, Moses and the leadership council of Israel had agreed to the request of Reuben and Gad that they be allowed to possess the land Israel had just won from the Midianites, the land of Moab. This land on the east side of the Jordan River, in what is now the modern day Kingdom of Jordan, would become Reuben and Gad's territorial allotments.

There is NO evidence that the war with Midian (which God told Moses to prosecute) was to be in any way associated with the occupation of Moab. Rather, Yehoveh's goal was to destroy those who had led Israel (as a nation) into adultery by enticing them to cavort with pagan women and pagan gods. While the subject is not specifically dealt with in Numbers, it seems to me that what Israel SHOULD have done is simply defeated the Midianites and their ally Moab, moved on and left the former nation of Moab empty; settling there was not on the Lord's agenda.

Moses was very uneasy about this proposal and even though Reuben and Gad agreed to send their very best crack troops to fight alongside the other 10 Israelite tribes as the conquest of Canaan began, we can detect that all was not well. What Reuben and Gad suggested did NOT fall within the Covenant of Abraham; the land they wanted was NOT within the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And yet we do not read of the Lord telling them, "no". In essence Reuben and Gad would live OUTSIDE the camp of Israel, OUTSIDE the Land of Promise, because they saw more benefit in the plentiful pasturelands of Moab than living in the provision of the Lord, Canaan.

It's informative to ask of ourselves first, WHY did Reuben and Gad (out of all the 12 tribes) decide to ask for this particular territory? Their immediate reason was that they possessed large flocks and herds and Moab was near-perfect pastureland. But if we go back a few centuries to when Jacob was giving his deathbed blessing to his 12 sons we find some clues; and it begins with the fact that Reuben was essentially disowned. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, was not given the traditional rights of the firstborn because Reuben had sexual relations with one of his father's concubines. Jacob stated that Reuben was "as unstable as water" and therefore would never excel. Reuben had all the physical attributes and intelligence and advantages to do well; but he lacked morality and strength of character and in time we'll see that Reuben preferred the nomad's lifestyle of ever being on the move to a more settled and sedentary one.

When recalling Jacob's blessings upon his sons, though it seems so implausible to our modern minds, grasp that each prophetic blessing was not so much upon an individual son, as upon

that son's future descendants; it was more intended as a prophet oracle upon those thousands upon thousands who would be members of the tribe named after the son personally. Jacob was pronouncing the destinies of the tribes each of his sons would spawn; he was pronouncing the characteristics that each of these tribes would develop, and those characteristics were but extensions of the already developed and displayed characteristics of his sons. Reuben's characteristic of instability would be passed along and realized within his tribe over the centuries, and it is what led the tribe of Reuben to choose **unwisely** to stay OUT of the Promised Land, in favor of staying in Moab, a land NOT set-apart for God's people.

Over time Reuben becomes less and less prominent in Israel's history. In fact some biblical historians claim that by Saul's time Reuben was absorbed into the tribe of Gad and disappeared. Other biblical writings don't support that severe of a consequence for Reuben, but rather what we do find is that the tribe of Reuben took on the lifestyle of Bedouins and wandered around the desert fringes of the Trans-Jordan, moving around with their flocks and herds. Technically Reuben still held territory and maintained their tribal identity, but practically they didn't govern their territory or create infrastructure within it or defend it with vigor so their territory more and more came under the influence of the tribe of Gad. As Bedouins, Reuben just didn't have much interest in controlling territory.

Gad had a little different destiny than Reuben; Jacob gave Gad the briefest of blessings and it was a very strange blessing indeed. The blessing was: "Gad, a troop will troop on him, but he will troop on their heel." Sounds like gobbeldy-gook, doesn't it? However the word Gad is associated with the Hebrew root **gedud** (a noun meaning troop) and it's associated verb **yegudenu** meaning "raided". This blessing by Jacob upon Gad was recorded as a play on words; it is all about Gad's future as a military force and the fact that they will have to fight off enemies all their days due to their location. Jacob's pronouncement upon Gad is much better translated as: "Gad, a troop will raid him, but he (Gad) will raid on their heel". In other words, Gad was going to be a tribe of warriors and they would have a rather hawkish attitude. They would be military oriented out of necessity. Enemies would constantly harass Gad but in the end they would generally win. And true to this 500-year-old blessing Gad had become a tremendously brave and effective tribe of fighters while out in the Wilderness. This is one reason that Moses insisted on having soldiers from the tribe of Gad accompany Israel into Canaan.

Further, Reuben and Gad (along with Simeon) formed one of the 4 divisions of Israel; they camped together on the south side of the Tabernacle. Reuben and Simeon were brothers; their mother was Leah, Jacob's first wife. Gad was the son of the Leah's handmaiden, Zilpah, so there existed a natural relationship between these three.

Now in the Lord's divine providence, even though it was never meant for Reuben and Gad to settle where they did, they provided a means of protection (a kind of defensive buffer) to help protect the other tribal territories (that would be located INSIDE the Promised Land as they were supposed to be) from the countless invaders from the east. Reuben and Gad would bear the brunt of many of the marauders who wanted to pass through their territory to get to the other tribes of Israel.

The start of verse 16 is important, because in the English the tone of the conversation gets lost. This section begins, "**....and then they came up (or stepped up) to him (Moses) and said.....**" The Hebrew for came up or stepped up is **va-yiggeshu**; and it means to beseech someone in a soft or intimate manner. In other words the leaders of Reuben and Gad were NOT demanding that they were staying or refusing to go forward. Rather they wanted to explain their reasoning for preferring the area of Moab for their homes and then make an offer that would satisfy the others and the Lord to show their intended continuing loyalty to Israel and to the Covenants of Abraham and Moses.

What they offered was that if allowed to settle in the Trans-Jordan that they would build a place for their animals, and they would build towns for their families. However they would also supply a large contingent of crack military troops to go forward into Canaan and fight alongside the other tribes of Israel. The Hebrew word for the kind of special troops being offered is **nechalats**; literally it means to be picked out or specially selected. The idea is that these are the fiercest fighters, the best of the best. Further these troops from Reuben and Gad would be the vanguard of the Israelite army as it fought and conquered its way through Canaan.

The deal is that these **nechalats** would not come back to their tribal territory in the Trans-Jordan until every Israelite tribe had possession of its own land in Canaan; they would stay and fight with their brothers as long as it took. Further they would not ask for additional territory on the west side of the Jordan, in the Promised Land. They would be satisfied to live only east of the Jordan, because it is their own choice.

Moses (undoubtedly with the approval of the leadership council) agrees to this proposal.

Let's re-read a portion of Chapter 32.

RE-READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 32:25 - end

So here we see that about 1/2 of the largest Israelite tribe, Manasseh, decided that they ALSO wanted to stay in the Trans-Jordan region (probably for the same reasons that Reuben and Gad wanted to). Now while nothing is said of it, this would have been a very traumatic and contentious matter. For a tribe to split itself in such a manner meant there was great disagreement among the clans that formed it, and this was a pretty serious situation. This also meant that two men were vying for top-dog (for prince, nasi) head of the tribe of Manasseh and undoubtedly this splitting of the tribe with part living on the east side of the Jordan and the other part living on the west bank of the Jordan was central to a peaceful resolution of the disagreement.

We are given no details about how this all came about, but from this point forward we'll start hearing the Bible speak of "**the 2 1/2 tribes**" that stayed on the east side of the Jordan; this simply means that two entire tribes (meaning all the clans of Reuben and Gad) PLUS 1/2 of the tribe of Manasseh (around 1/2 of the many clans that formed Manasseh) made the decision to settle in the Trans-Jordan. The remaining clans that formed the other half of the tribe of Manasseh went on with the other tribes of Israel into Canaan to conquer and settle it.

Reuben settled directly on the east bank of the Dead Sea, while Gad inhabited an area east of the Jordan River and generally located between the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and the northern end of the Dead Sea. The 1/2 tribe of Manasseh settled on land that began at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and extended north to about Mt. Hermon. This didn't all happen immediately; it took a few scores of years before the boundaries took form, but even then the make-up of each territory fluctuated with time and political circumstances.

As was customary in that era these 3 Israelite tribes rebuilt some of the cities they had destroyed in the battle with Midian, changed the city names to Hebrew city names, and settled there. The reasons for rebuilding a city rather than starting fresh somewhere else are many but in general it is that a) a city was invariably located near a good water source, and water was not easily available everywhere; b) there were usually established roads and paths built up to each town and city where traders and merchants brought needed goods; and c) the most obvious reason was that the building materials from the previous city were just laying there ready to be re-used to construct the new city. Since most construction was of stone, it was generally a matter of just piling the stones back up again.

Those of you who have been to Israel with me have seen dozens of enormous earthen mounds called Tels, scattered all over the land. These Tels are the remains of ancient cities that once existed there, but are now covered over with many feet of dirt and debris brought in by centuries of wind and rain. The thing is that every Tel is a system of layers; and looking like a layer-cake, each layer represents a once thriving city that was destroyed. The layer just above it represents the next city, which was built directly upon the former destroyed city, using much of its rubble and building material. Sometimes there are as many as 18 or 20 layers in a single Tel; that is, 18 or 20 cities, each one built upon the remains of the one before it are present. I have no doubt that the cities that the army of Israel destroyed in Moab had already been built upon the ruins of yet more ancient cities. And now Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh would simply repeat the process, adding yet another layer to the many Tels. And after them other civilizations would do the same. Therefore identifying these city names we see in Numbers 32 is quite difficult in our time because the names only existed until that city was destroyed; the next new city built upon it usually was given a new name (though often it was the SAME name, just in a different language).

Let's move on to Chapter 33.

READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 33 all

What we have here is a brief travelogue of the Israelites' journey through the Wilderness. And we can learn several things from it beyond simply their route. For instance we find that even though it is said in earlier passages that Israel left Egypt on Passover that is NOT technically correct. For we are told that they left Egypt on Nisan 15, which is the 1st day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the day following Passover). However as I explained in a previous lesson, we will soon see that the Biblical Feasts of Passover and Matza become fused such that the two become celebrated as one and the whole celebration is called alternately Passover or Matza. Allow me to re-state this because it may help to understand the difficulties some scholars and pastors (and bible students) have in coming to a conclusion as to what day it was

when Christ was crucified.

Passover, by Scriptural ordinance of God, was a 1-day festival that was to occur on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Nisan. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a 7-day festival that was to begin the day AFTER Passover, on the 15th of Nisan. So Passover (1 day) and Unleavened Bread (7 days), taken together are 8 consecutive days of feasting but are in fact two separate feasts that merely run consecutively.

Let me also point out a key piece of information: the way the original Egyptian Passover was conducted and the way Passover was performed after leaving Egypt and in future times was somewhat different. For one thing in Egypt even though the Passover lamb was killed and its blood smeared on the doorposts of homes on the 14th of Nisan, the Passover lamb was not eaten until a few hours later, after dark, which means it was now the start of a new day, Nisan 15. Recall that the Biblical way of determining the end of one day and the start of the new day was sunset. So during the daytime of Nisan 14 in Egypt, the lamb was slaughtered and the cooking process began; and then after dark (which is the NEXT day) they ate it.

The other thing to understand is that while technically Nisan 14th is called Passover and it was on this day that the lamb was slaughtered and prepared, the Lord did not kill the Egyptian firstborn until midnight AFTER the Hebrews had eaten the Passover Lamb. Therefore since the day had changed at sunset (around 7 pm) the Egyptian firstborns were killed early on Nisan 15, which thereafter would become the 1st day of the 7 day Biblical Festival of Unleavened Bread (Matza). Then the following morning while it was STILL the 15th of Nisan, the Hebrews gathered and left Egypt. That's a little different than we typically think of it, but it is how it happened.

In teaching the book of Exodus I have taught this in more simplistic terms, using the vocabulary that the Church uses most typically associated with the Exodus; that is, the common way of speaking that the Passover marked the smearing of the lamb's blood on the doorposts, the eating of the lamb, the Lord's killing of the Egyptian firstborns, and Israel leaving Egypt. Now part of the reason that the Church first presented the Egyptian Passover in this way (even though **technically** it is a bit off the mark) is likely because of confused gentile scholars (who didn't particularly want to hear anything the Jewish Rabbis had to say) who didn't understand that there **a)** was a slightly different Egyptian Passover versus all future Passovers, **b)** that the Exodus, Leviticus and even Numbers protocol of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread became modified in Deuteronomy and then further modified by the establishment of Traditions, **c)** as a result of "b" the technical Scriptural definitions of the Passover day versus the Feast of Matza days are one thing, but what the common Jewish way of speaking about them was, and how the Jews enumerated them and what they called them was something else entirely. And **d)** there eventually arose several different Traditions about how to do Passover and the Feast of Matza, and they all were occurring simultaneously. Generally speaking one Tradition was used by the Jews living in Judea, another by the Jews living in Samaria (who had broken away from the Jerusalem Temple and built their own), yet another for Jews living in the Galilee because they had to journey so far to get to the Jerusalem Temple, and still another for Jews living in the Diaspora (that is, Jews living outside of the Holy Lands altogether), to account for their living among pagan gentiles and the

sometimes impossible travel distances necessary to get to the Temple in Jerusalem for the ceremonies.

I don't mean to go off on a tangent here, but sometime we'll discuss the Passover as it occurred at the time Jesus was crucified and I'll do my best to explain why there is such disagreement on which day He died, and even whether the Lord's Supper was the Passover seder (meal) or something else entirely. And along with the reality that the order that things occurred at the Egyptian Passover (and on what day) was not followed in subsequent Passovers, there were also these several competing Traditions of just HOW to conduct Passover that existed in Jesus' day, PLUS the use of the common everyday Jewish terminology that is used in the Gospel accounts and NOT the use of the technical ritual terminology of the Feast days (as found in the Torah) that, when taken together, leads to the problem. In addition, the synoptic Gospels do not match the Gospel of John. That, however, is understandable when we understand that the Synoptic Gospels were from the viewpoint of **Galilean** Jews (with their own Passover Traditions), but it is generally agreed that the Apostle John (who wrote the Gospel of John) had become a **Judean** Jew after beginning life as a Galilean fisherman or was expressing the Judean Tradition (with THEIR own different Passover Traditions). But, that is a long and complex lesson all in itself so let's take that up another time.

So the beginning point of the travelogue of Numbers 33 is Ra'amses (in the land of Goshen) in Egypt, and the day they left Egypt was the 15th day of the 1st month of the Hebrew ritual calendar year (remember, the Hebrews used several different calendars for various purposes), and this month was called Nisan.

We're given only one other date: that of Aaron, the High Priest's death on the 1st day of the 5th month of the 40th year in the Wilderness, and it happened at Mt. Hor. That means that VERY little time elapsed from the date of Aaron's death until Israel marched up to Moab, then the Balaam incident, then the Midian War (which probably lasted but a few days), and then Moses would die; probably a span of 3 or 4 months or so.

And we are told that Moses was instructed to write down this itinerary. Now what was the purpose of doing this since the Torah has been recording it as we go? All we can do is speculate because we're not told. The reality is that if we go back and check on the name places that the Israelites camped at (the ones we've encountered up to now), we'll find that this list in Numbers 33 does not match. We'll find a few place names missing, and others added.

When we count them up, we find that 42 stations (places where they stopped and something or another occurred) are listed in Numbers 33. So, some scholars have tried to find significance in the number "42". I'm not convinced that there is any. If we look hard enough we can find other uses of the number 42 in the Bible (such as the 7 year period in the End Times that Christians call the Tribulation being divided into two 42 month periods). Even the Matthew version of Yeshua's genealogy consists of 42 generations. But, it would be quite a stretch to find some common theological cord that connects all these various uses of the number "42", and I just don't see it. Maybe sometime in the future the Lord will open my eyes to something I'm currently missing in that regard.

At the least, most scholars and Rabbis agree that what we have is a listing of stations that Israel passed through where something of significance happened. In total, this is a reminder to future readers of Israel's arduous journey, and how the Lord at various points instructed them, punished them, provided for them, destroyed some of them, and saved most of them. It is a reminder of just how much they had to overcome in order to escape the grip of Egypt, and to claim the land that the Lord set apart for them. And, I think it has achieved its purpose because I cannot think of a greater event in Israel's history (an event of uplifting nature) that is seared into the mind and soul of every Jew, than their Exodus from Egypt.

Now, there are only a few of these 42 locations that are known to some degree of certainty, today. As a result there are many maps with various routes of the Exodus indicated, and I don't think it's worth our while to deal with it because to a fault these maps show the Israelites basically wandering around the Sinai, with the traditional Christian location of Mt. Sinai towards the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula as the hub of their travels. The fact is the Sinai could never have supported a group of 3000 Israelites, let alone 3 million. So, I don't buy it.

There is not a shred of archaeological evidence supporting an Exodus that follows the traditional itinerary. The long held and intractable stance that so many Christian scholars have held on this issue of the route of the Exodus is the primary reason we have so many secular scholars (and even more liberal Christian scholars) doubting there even was an Exodus, because they insist on looking for artifacts of the Exodus in the wrong locations.

I am reasonably certain that the real Mt. Sinai is in Arabia, in an area at one time held by Midian, because that's exactly where the Bible says it is. And, so do such notables as Philo and Josephus say the location is in Arabia (and they ought to know better than us). Many artifacts have been found in the former area of Midian (on the southwestern Arabian Peninsula) that fits the Hebrew culture and that time period and the Bible descriptions of geographical characteristics of Mt. Sinai. And, there is a wealth of local Arabian folklore that supports it as well. No such folklore or tradition exists for the Sinai Peninsula.

As we arrive at verse 50, the recorded itinerary of Numbers 33 reaches its final station: Abel-Shittim in the steppes of Moab. And, it was here where the Lord God gave Moses general instructions about just how the Israelites are to go about conquering Canaan. In a nutshell they are to drive all the people out who currently live there. Then Israel is to destroy all of their idols and idol worship paraphernalia. Wherever an altar or a temple or a high-place to a pagan god has been built, it's to be torn down.

To be clear: Canaan is to be emptied of its people. The Lord does not want them there anymore. The detestable religion of the Canaanites is to be overthrown and every remnant of it done away with. The Lord has not ordered genocide; but it is understood that those who resist the Israelite takeover (soldiers in battle) or those who refuse to leave after the battle is won are to be killed. Also inherent in the instruction (a long established God-principle) is that any who will forsake their false gods and join Israel are welcome to do so.

Under no circumstance are the Israelites to allow a foreign people or tribe to remain as a separate people, apart from Israel, nor can any god but Yehoveh be worshipped in the land of

Canaan. Please keep this set of instructions in mind from here forward: because what happens when we decide to modify God's instructions because it seems more merciful or fair or loving or tolerant to our human politically-correct sensibilities is rebellion, plain and simple. And, the result WILL be disaster.

Next, in verse 54, instructions are given on apportioning the land among the Israelite tribes. But, wait; hasn't the Lord already given these same instructions? Yes and no. In Numbers chapter 26 the land apportionment was spoken of in terms of taking a census of the tribes as a precursor to dividing up the land according to the size of each tribe. But, that was when there were 12 tribes to divide the land among; now, there is but 9 tribes plus 1/2 of the tribe of Manessah. And, this because Reuben and Gad plus 1/2 of Manessah received permission to settle on the east side of the Jordan River, and by doing so offered to give up any right to territory inside the Promised Land.

Chapter 33 ends with a dire warning (that wasn't taken seriously by the way) from God to Israel that IF they did not follow His instructions, precisely, about the method used to take Canaan, bad things would follow.

Let me quote to you the last 2 verses of chapter 33:

NAS Numbers 33:55 *'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land in which you live. 56* *'And it shall come about that as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.'*"

Israel has NEVER heeded this warning; Joshua didn't, David didn't, not even the modern Israel that has returned to its homeland after a 1900-year exile has obeyed this divine directive. It still allows foreigners, not joined to Israel, to reside there. It allows pagan religions (particularly Islam) to exist alongside the worship of Yehoveh. It even gives its enemies positions in its governing body, the Knesset.

It allows and promotes atheism. It allows and promotes homosexuality. It allows and even defends Muslims controlling the Temple grounds of Yehoveh's former dwelling place. But, even worse, it gives away portions of the Promised Land to its enemies for unfulfilled promises of peace; land the Scriptures say it has utterly no right to dispose of because they don't own it.....the Lord owns it.

Until Israel stops these practices, secures the land as instructed, returns to the Lord and repents there will always be wars, and terrorists, and suicide bombings, and some group of people or another who devote their lives to making Israel miserable.

By the way, don't anyone here shake your head knowingly at this and think, "how dumb can Israel be". Because most of the problems in our individual lives.....as members of God's Kingdom, that entity that Paul refers to as the Israel of God or True Israel.....are because WE do not secure our lives as instructed, we do not obey the Lord and repent, and so our lives are

made miserable.

By the way: the land the Lord set apart for Israel; the land that Israel would soon conquer and possess at Joshua's leadership is the West Bank. Does that name sound familiar? That's right, the land that our current administration demands Israel give up to their enemies, the West Bank, is the very land that the Lord said was for Israel and Israel alone. The Israelites have paid a terrible price for 3300 years for refusing to follow the Lord's explicit instructions regarding that land and who is allowed to possess and dwell in it. Do you suppose that those nations, like America, who insist that Israel continue to disregard those instructions are going to be spared God's wrath? How about the approximately 50% of the Church that insists that Israel give up its land, because the Jews supposedly no longer have a right to it?

We'll start chapter 34 next week.