

Old Testament History

Lesson #8

Numbers 20:1-Deuteronomy 34:12

Outline

I. *Studies In Numbers*

- A. From Sinai to Kadesh (10:11-20:29).
 - 1. Moses' failure at Meribah (20:1-13).
 - 2. Opposition from Edom (20:14-21).
 - 3. The death of Aaron (20:22-29).
- B. From Kadesh to the plains of Moab (21:1-25:18).
 - 1. The defeat of Arad, Sihon, and Og (21:1-35).
 - 2. Balak and Balaam (22:1-24:25).
 - 3. Idolatry at Baal Peor (25:1-18).
- C. Preparations for entering Canaan (26:1-36:13).
 - 1. Second census of the men of war (26:1-65).
 - 2. Zelophehad's daughters (27:1-11).
 - 3. Joshua to succeed Moses (27:12-23).
 - 4. Rules for offerings and vows (28:1-30:16).
 - 5. War against Midian (31:1-54).
 - 6. The Transjordan tribes (32:1-42).
 - 7. Summary of the journey from Egypt to Canaan (33:1-56).
 - 8. Canaan apportioned by lot (34:1-29).
 - 9. Levite towns and cities of refuge (35:1-34).
 - 10. Zelophehad's daughters and marriage (36:1-13).

II. *Studies In Deuteronomy*

- A. Historical prologue.
 - 1. The desert wanderings (2:1-23).
 - 2. The Transjordan campaign (2:24-3:20).
 - 3. Moses forbidden to enter Canaan (3:21-29).
- B. Conclusion of Moses' ministry (31:1-34:12).
 - 1. The death of Moses (34:1-12).

Notes

Numbers 20:1-29

- There seems to be a gap of 38 years between chapters 19 and 20. Miriam, at about 130 years old, died at Kadeshbarnea. Miriam, Aaron, and Moses all died in the same year. The fresh start was made from the very spot where the old was broken off. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, only Moses and Aaron were now left -- weary, worn pilgrims, to begin a new journey with new pilgrims, who had to learn the dealings of God all over again.

- In the hardness of their hearts it now seemed as if the prospect before them was hopeless, and they were destined to suffer the same fate as their fathers. Such a rebellious people would never be allowed to enter the land.
- Moses is nowhere in scripture blamed for striking instead of speaking to the rock, while it is explicitly stated that the people "angered" him (cf. Psalm 106:33). In their rebellion against Moses and Aaron, the people had not believed that God would bring them into the land which He had given them; while, in their anger at the people, Moses and Aaron had not believed God, to glorify Him in His power and grace in the eyes of the children of Israel. It was evidence of pride and unbelief, very uncharacteristic of Moses (Numbers 12:3).
- Unlike Abraham in similar circumstances, he "staggered" at the promises (cf. Romans 4:20). And having failed as mediator of the people because of his unbelief, his office would cease, and the leading of Israel into the land to be given to another.
- Kadeshbarnea is usually identified with a series of good-sized springs located in the region of Ain Qudeirat and Ain Qudeis. This area is located about 50 miles southwest of Beersheba. Archaeological excavations have revealed the remains of a series of small fortresses from the 10th to 6th centuries B.C., but no actual physical remains from the time of the Israelite encampment there.
- Within a day's journey of the place of his sin, the divine sentence upon Aaron was executed. In his full priestly dress, Aaron walked to his burial. Israel at that time "vowed a vow" to completely destroy the cities of the Canaanites, and God listened and heard.

Numbers 21:1-35; 33:35-49; Deuteronomy 2:1-3:11

- From the fact that the brazen serpent is also called "fiery," we can infer that the expression describes the appearance of these "fire-snakes" rather than the effect of their bite. The Israelites repented quickly and God used a marvelous symbol to teach them. Hezekiah had to destroy the serpent 700 years later because the people turned it into an idol (2 Kings 18:4; cf. Romans 1:25).
- In a sense, God overcame the sting of death by faith (Isaiah 45:22). In fact, many elements of the remedy find their counterpart in the gospel. The serpent was not effective in Moses' hand -- it had to be lifted up. Jesus made the point to Nicodemus that He would have to be "lifted up" or crucified (cf. John 3:14).
- The territory of the Amorites stretched from the Arnon to the Jabbok. It had originally belonged to the Moabites (Numbers 21:26), but they had been driven south by the Amorites. Their courage and confidence in God was high.

- From the plateau on the mountains of the Abarim, Israel had its first view of Canaan. At last the goal was in view! The decisive battle between Sihon and Israel was fought almost within sight of the Dead Sea.
- The mission of Moses, the servant of the Lord, must now come to an end, and the necessary arrangements made for possessing and keeping the land of Palestine.

Numbers 22:1-35

- Before crossing into Canaan, it was absolutely necessary for the people, once and for all, to have a full knowledge of the real character of heathenism in its relation to the kingdom of God. Israel had to learn that the heathen nations were not only hostile political powers, but that heathenism itself was antagonistic to the kingdom of God. The two were incompatible, so no alliance could ever be formed with heathenism. Heathenism would have never thought of denying the existence or power of God as the God of the Hebrews (cf. 1 Kings 20:23; 2 Kings 18:25, 33-35). What it denied was that God was the only God.
- The story of Balaam begins with the fear of Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab. With the vast army of Israel encamped on the edge of his territory, he feared the very worst. Balak's fear was intensified because of Israel's victories over his northern enemy neighbors. A new, stronger enemy was present, before whom Balak and his people seemed to be powerless
- Balaam, or rather Bileam, the son of Beor, apparently belonged to a family of magicians who resided at Pethor (located on the western bank of the Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia). It has been suggested that this was a city of professional soothsayers or students of that craft.
- According to heathen views, a magician had absolute and irresistible power with the gods; power was inherent in him or in the incantations which he used. Herein lay one of the fundamental differences between heathenism and the Old Testament, between magic and miracles. With heathenism, all of the emphasis was on man, while in the Old Testament, it was the power of God.
- National deities might be induced to transfer their blessing and protection from one nation to another. If God's blessing of the Israelites could be destroyed, then they would no longer be a threat. As a professional magician, belonging to a family of magicians, and residing at one of their major cities, it was his duty and certainly within his interest to learn about these matters. Balaam's inquiries had gone back far beyond the recent dealings of God to His original relationship with His people (cf. Genesis 13:16 and Numbers 23:10; Genesis 49:9 and

Numbers 23:24, 24:9; Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17). All of these prove beyond doubt that Balaam knew of the promises of God to Israel.

- Throughout this incident, Balaam did not go a step beyond the heathen point of view (cf. Acts 8:13; 19:13-14). Had Balaam possessed even the most elementary knowledge of God as the only true and living God, or the most elementary understanding of His purpose, he could not, considering his acquaintance with previous prophecy, have entertained the idea of allying himself with Balak against Israel. If he could have influenced God to turn Him from His purpose concerning Israel, then he would have reached his goal of becoming the most powerful magician in the world.
- Just as Pharaoh earlier, Balaam was an effective instrument for carrying out God's purpose (Exodus 9:16; cf. Romans 9:17). He believed that he had a way with the gods, a hold on them. To him Israel's Lord was not the Lord of heaven but just another deity whom he might manipulate. He was in for the surprise of his life.
- With no spiritual, only a heathen acknowledgment of God, covetousness and ambition were the motives of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11). The Lord gave Balaam grudging permission to go down to Moab, on the condition that he would faithfully repeat the true message of God in the presence of Balak and the Moabites. But because of the struggle between duty and greed that went on in Balaam's heart as he responded to Balak's invitation, God had to remind him very sternly that his failure to carry out his commission with complete faithfulness would result in his instant death. Hence the dramatic scene occurred, where God used the donkey as His mouthpiece to rebuke the stubborn prophet and warn him of danger. Balaam was playing with God's will, seeing how far he could go.

Numbers 22:36-25:18; 31:1-20

- The elaborate sacrificial actions of Balaam and Balak are pagan. The number seven was held in high regard among Semitic peoples in general. The many animals would provide abundant liver and organ materials for the diviner. Balaam was in charge; Balak was now his subordinate. Despite the pagan and unsavory actions, God, in protecting His people, rewires Balaam's mouth so that he only blesses Israel. This sorcerer could not overcome the power of God.
- Before the second parable, Balak thought that a larger view of the camp of Israel might change Balaam's attitude. From this vantage point, Moses, not long afterwards, took His final look at the wonderful land which the Lord had promised to His people.
- The fourth parable introduced four prophetic messages. The first referred to Moab as the representative of heathenism. The second was

against Amalek as the representative of heathenism in its first contest against Israel. The third favored the Kenites as the allies of Israel. The fourth addressed the Assyrian Empire. Ultimately "Chittim" was applied to Rome (cf. Daniel 11:30). The resulting meaning may refer to the final battle between forces of the west (the Kittim) and forces of the east (Asshur and Eber) -- a battle in which both will be destroyed, presumably before a greater power -- the Lord.

- Balaam really wanted money and honor, so he told Balak how to defeat them. It was a very simple plan. he turned the people from God by seducing them into idolatry and all of its associated sins (Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14). If Satan cannot win as a lion, he will win as the serpent. The women of Moab and Edom accomplished what armies could not. Ironically, only Israel could destroy Israel. However, Phinehas took a stand for separation and holiness (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). In the end, 24,000 Israelites perished in a plague and Balaam was killed (25:9; 31:8, 16).
- The figure of Balaam stands out alone in the history of the Old Testament. The only counterpart to him is Judas Iscariot. When Balaam failed to turn God away from Israel, he succeeded in turning Israel from God. When Judas failed to turn Christ from His purpose concerning His people, he succeeded in turning Israel, as a nation, from their King.

Numbers 26:1-36:13

- The first census, taken over 38 years earlier, was for conscription to the army for the conquest of Canaan. The reason for the second census was to divide the land in view of its coming possession. The amount of land each tribe would receive depended upon its size, but its location was determined by lot (Numbers 26:53-55).
- In Numbers 27:12-14, God introduced once again Moses' sin and judgment to show His holiness and justice, even in the case of His beloved servant. It is touching to see how meekly Moses received the sentence. Faithful to the end in his stewardship over God's house, his main concern was that God would appoint an appropriate successor. To this end, Joshua was set apart by the laying on of Moses' hands, in the presence of Eleazar the priest and the congregation. Now that the people were about to take possession of the land, the sacrificial ordinances were once again commanded.
- The Israelites attacked Midian, "avenging" themselves for the great sin into which they had been tempted (Numbers 25:16-18). The expedition, which was accompanied by Phinehas, whose zeal had stopped the plague earlier (Numbers 25:7-8), was completely successful.
- The necessary arrangements before the possession of the land concluded with two series of commands. The first was the extermination

of the Canaanites and all traces of their idolatry. The boundary line of Canaan was given and Eleazar, along with Joshua and ten other representative priests, would oversee the partitioning of the land. The second was the giving of the cities to the Levites. There were 48 assigned to them to "dwell in," but they would not necessarily be alone. This distribution provided a spiritual influence over all the people, since no one lived more than 10 miles from a city in which Levites lived. Six cities were set up as cities of refuge, three on each side of the Jordan, for the unintentional manslayer.

Deuteronomy 3:23-29; Deuteronomy 34:1-12

- In Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, many laws had been given to the Israelites. Now, at the border of Canaan, with the people ready to enter the land at last, these laws are rehearsed and expounded, in anticipation of -- and with application to -- settled life in Canaan.
- Deuteronomy is more than simply a restatement of the Law. It is a formal treaty between God and the people of Israel. The discovery in 1906-07 of some 10,000 tablets in the ancient Hittite capital Khattusa (Boghaz-koy in modern Turkey) provided examples of Hittite treaties that show that Deuteronomy has all the elements contained in Hittite treaties from the 2nd millennium B.C., largely in the same sequence. They are also seen in suzerain (supreme party) and vassal covenants. The order of sections is as follows: Introduction of speaker (Deuteronomy 1:1-5; Joshua 24:1-2), Historical prologue (Deuteronomy 1:6-3:29; Joshua 24:2-13), Stipulations (Deuteronomy 4:1-26:19; Joshua 24:14-25), Statement concerning the document (Deuteronomy 27:2-3; Joshua 24:26), Witnesses (Deuteronomy 31:1-32:52; Joshua 24:22, 27), and Curses and blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-68; Joshua 24:20).
- Forty years earlier, Moses had written God's words in a book (Exodus 17:14; 24:4, 7). He had also kept a diary of his journeys (Numbers 33:2). Now his book was completed, and he handed it over to the priests and Levites, with instructions that it must be read periodically to the people (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). Reading God's book brought about a great reformation under Josiah (2 Kings 23) and the renewal under Ezra (Nehemiah 8). The New Testament books were also written to be read in the churches (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
- Moses had believed in it; he had preached it; he had prayed for it; he had worked and fought for it. Now within reach and view of it he must lay himself down to die. The Bible records with touching simplicity what passed between Moses and his heavenly Father (Deuteronomy 3:23-28). Moses prayed that God would repent and allow him to enter the Promised Land, but He refused.

- It was the will of God that Moses lay himself down to rest without entering the land. Just as Jesus did the will of His Father, so did Moses. God knew that Joshua would lead the people into their earthly rest, just as the heavenly Joshua, Jesus Christ, would lead His people into spiritual rest. To be a perfect type, Moses, the representative of the Law, could not lead them into their rest.
- Aside from Jesus, it has never been given to any man to be the mediator of so many stupendous manifestations of divine power. Moses could not have delivered Israel out of Egypt and sustained them in the wilderness for 40 years without the direct, miraculous help of God. But this high privilege, as in the case of the apostle Paul, was accompanied by almost unbearable suffering (cf. Numbers 11:11-15).
- Amid the respectful silence of a mourning people, he set out alone on his last journey. On the top of Mt. Nebo, God prepared something better for Moses to which entrance into the land of earthly promise could not compare. After the people watched him ascend, no mortal eye saw him until, with Elijah, he stood on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. On that mountain, the "steward over God's house" did homage to the "Son in His own house" (Hebrews 3:1-6). Often a leader is more appreciated in death than life. The book closes with a reminder of the unique character of Moses' ministry.