

The Bible From 20,000 Feet
Part 17: Numbers ch. 15 – ch. 25, Deuteronomy ch. 2 – ch. 3:11

Tuesday Night Bible Study, November 25, 2008

--OUTLINE:

- ISRAEL BEGINS THEIR 40 YEAR WANDERING IN THE DESERT
- MORE REBELLION IN ISRAEL'S CAMP AND INSIGHTS INTO TACTICS OF SATAN
- THE END OF ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS WANDERING AND ENCOUNTER WITH BALAAM ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB EAST OF JERICHO

--ISRAEL BEGINS THEIR 40 YEAR WANDERING IN THE DESERT

--Numbers ch. 15

--misc. points in chapter 15... after futile attempt to enter the Promise Land when God told them not to enter and after God sentences them to a prolonged waiting period in the desert, God immediately gives more instruction regarding sacrificial offerings for when they eventually do enter the Promise Land, thus reaffirming that He still plans to eventually lead them into the land as He promised.

(ch. 16-17 covered in next section)

--Numbers ch. 18

- further instructions given for duties of the Levites
- tithe for Levites and 1/10th of the tithe for the family of priests within the Levites

--Numbers ch. 19

--further instruction given for laws of purification... how to be purified of physical ceremonial uncleanness... not only to promote healthy environment but also symbolic of spiritual cleansing that was needed... such as cleansing through atonement that saved Israel from God's wrath...

--MORE REBELLION IN ISRAEL'S CAMP AND INSIGHTS INTO TACTICS OF SATAN

--Numbers ch. 16

--another rebellion arises, this time a group of Levites and Reubenites, against Moses and Aaron's authority...

--16:3-14: "They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?' ... 12 Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. But they said, "We will not come! 13 Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? 14 Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!"

--their argument is based on a complete distortion of reality...

--"all the congregation is holy" ... ignored Israel's track-record of constantly straying.

--"you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert" ... they were brought out of a land of slavery and death to enjoy freedom in the promise land!

--in reality, if it wasn't for the intercession of Moses then God would have killed the entire nation in judgement!

--"why do you exalt yourself" ... ignored fact that God had set Moses in his place of leadership and that Moses was a very humble man (Numbers 12:3)

--they also challenged Aaron and his descendants appointment to the priesthood (God appointed the rest of the Levites to be assistants to the priests) ... in this they were essentially challenging the means God provided to make atonement for Israel's sin ... without which the entire nation would have been killed by God's judgement!

--"you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance" ... Moses wasn't to blame but they themselves were to blame because of their unbelief that resulted in God's judgement.

--the rebel's argument is a picture of spiritual warfare and how Satan works!

--Satan always distorts reality... the temptations we face and much of the world's opposition to Christianity is based on a profound distortion of reality, just like the rebels argument was based on a profound distortion of reality!

--just like the rebels called Egypt where they were enslaved "the land flowing with milk and honey" so Satan tries to get us to think that the ways of sin is the way to happiness rather than the way to death and destruction!

--Jesus called Satan the father of lies (John 8:44)

--why is it sometimes so difficult to resist Satan's lies?

--because our flesh is weak... Jesus said, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:38)

--because of this rebellion the entire nation once again is dependent on the intervention of Moses...

--16:20-24: "And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' Then they fell on their faces, and said, 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?' 23 So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram [the leaders of the rebellion].'"

--God then judges the leaders of the rebellion by causing the earth to open up and swallow them.
--this served as a miraculous sign to the entire nation to reaffirm that God had appointed Moses and Aaron... "And Moses said:"By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will." (16:28)

--God then judges those who followed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and tried to do the work of the priests...

-16:35: "And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense."

--then God commanded the bronze censers illegally used by the rebels to be taken from the ashes and hammered into plates to be used as a covering for the alter in the temple to serve as a reminder that only descendants of Aaron could serve as priests.

--incredibly, on the very next day there is another rebellion...

--16:41-45: "On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the LORD.'"

--once again the rebellion is based on misinformation/misunderstanding...

--they thought Moses and Aaron killed the rebels, but in reality God killed them and it was the intercession of Moses and Aaron that resulted in the rest of Israel being spared!

--this repeated theme of misinformation and misunderstanding that permeated Israel's thinking continued in the time of Christ when most of Israel's religious leaders completely misunderstood Christ... one may wonder why He was so rejected by the very people to which He came...but their rejection of God and misunderstanding of what He promised was nothing new!

--as we saw in part 15, just as Israel didn't believe in God's promise to deliver them into the promise land so they, as a nation, didn't believe in God's promise of salvation through Christ!

--once again, Israel is dependent on the intervention of Moses, and, more specifically, they are dependent on the means of atonement that God provided, as this scene dramatically portrays...

--16:42: Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. 44 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 'Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' And they fell on their faces. 46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident."

--so here we see a dramatic illustration of what would happen without atonement being made...atonement through the ceremonial law that only Aaron and his descendants could administer....

--just as the Spirit of God dwelled in the heart of Israel's camp (through the Tabernacle) so the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts....and just as Israel would be consumed by God's wrath without atonement being made for their sins so we would be consumed by God's wrath without atonement through Christ...an invisible, spiritual reality that affects us every day of our life!

--Numbers ch. 17

--God then further confirms that he has chosen Aaron and His descendants to administer the means of atonement through the tabernacle...

--12 rods from 12 heads of each tribe taken (with Aaron's name written on rod from tribe of Levi) and placed in tabernacle... then God caused the rod with Aaron's name on it to blossom as a sign that he had chosen Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests in the tabernacle.

--THE END OF ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS WANDERING AND ENCOUNTER WITH BALAAM ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB EAST OF JERICHO

--Numbers ch. 20 – ch. 21

--these chapters pick up narrative near end of 40 years in wilderness... (overview of path through wilderness given in Deuteronomy ch. 2 and Numbers ch. 33)

--people complain about running out of water...

--this was probably not the first time, but this time near the end of the 40 years is recorded because of Moses' reaction...

--God commands Moses to speak to a rock and then water will gush out of the rock, but rather than walking in the Spirit Moses lashes out in anger at Israel's stubbornness and strikes the rock and says "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"

--Moses not only strikes the rock instead of speaking to it but also fails to represent God to them in his anger.

--this mistake cost Moses that opportunity to enter the Promise Land, and instead he dies in the wilderness. (though, in the future, after the resurrection, he will see the ultimate fulfillment of Israel living in the Promise Land during the Millennial Kingdom).

--journey out of wilderness wandering begins...

--summary in Deuteronomy ch. 2: " 2: 1... For a long time we made our way around the hill country of Seir. 2 Then the LORD said to me, 3 "**You have made your way around this hill country long enough; now turn north...**" ... 7 [Moses said] The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything..."

--God led Israel north around promise land to area east of the middle of the Promise Land where they would eventually cross the Jordan and begin to conquer the Promise Land from the middle.

--traveling north Israel engaged in scattered battles while battles avoided with certain people God had already established and commanded Israel to leave in peace (Lot's descendants and Esau's descendants)

--battles along the way to entering Canaan were a kind of warmup, a gradual thawing of the 40 year deep freeze of God's military favor...

--Deuteronomy 2:24-25: "Rise, take your journey, and cross over the River Arnon. Look, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to possess it, and engage him in battle. This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the nations under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you."

--Aaron dies and his son Eleazar takes his place as high priest. (Numbers 20:22-29)

--Numbers 21:4-9 records another incident of Israel losing faith and complaining... and healing through the bronze serpent from the plague that resulted.

--next week in part 18 we'll take a closer look at this incident and how it foreshadows Christ

--THE END OF ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS WANDERING AND ENCOUNTER WITH BALAAM ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB EAST OF JERICHO

--Numbers ch. 22 – ch. 24

--Israel arrives at plains east of Jericho across Jordan... "Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho..." (Deuteronomy 22:1)

--Balak, king of Moabites, was terrified of Israel and sends messengers to hire a prophet called Balaam to curse Israel... "Please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed." (ch. 22:6)

--Balaam was a curious mixture of good and evil... a prophet who seemed to follow the Lord at times, as he said, "the Lord my God" (22:18), but later corrupt motivation in him is revealed... "because your way is perverse before Me..." (22:32) followed by repentance... ("I have sinned...if it displeases you I will turn back...")

--New Testament only speaks of Balaam in negative way...

--Balaam seemed to want to curse Israel for the monetary gain ("the wages of wickedness" – 2 Peter 2:15) but at the same time would not go against the command of the Lord...seemed to keep moving forward looking for way where God wouldn't stop him.

--2 Peter 2:15: "They [false teachers] have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness..."

--Num 31:16 indicates that Balaam was somehow involved in getting Israel to commit adultery with the Midianites who lived in the land of Moab: "these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor)

--perhaps Balaam revealed this weakness in Israel to Balak for a bribe.

--Balaam was killed by Israel when they attacked the Midianites at the command of the Lord. (Numbers 31:8)

--rather than pronouncing a curse on Israel as Balak hoped, Balaam ended up pronouncing a prophetic blessing as the Lord directed him.

--Numbers ch. 25

--the king of Moab couldn't defeat Israel militarily but his people caused 24,000 Israelites to perish through seducing them into immorality, apparently through council of Balaam.

--they caused the very hand of God who judged Israel's enemies to judge Israel herself.

--25:1-5: "Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. 2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger [in the form of a plague] of the LORD may turn away from Israel." 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor." ... So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Phinehas the son of Eleazer, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath....' [*because he made*] atonement for the children of Israel..."

--without the means of atonement God provided the entire nation once again would have been destroyed.

--immorality in Israel (not military might of other nations) is what eventually led to Israel's total destruction 1000 years later.