

NUMBERS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Numbers chapter 31 as we continue our study through the Word of God. At this point the children of Israel have been out of their bondage in Egypt for 40 years. They are preparing to enter the Promise Land. The old generation who refused to enter the Promise Land because of unbelief has all died off in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb. And now Moses has instructed the next generation in what they need to do. In fact, the book of Deuteronomy is Moses going over their history, kind of his last will and testament, his farewell address to the nation to prepare them to enter into the Promise Land.

Miriam, the sister of Moses has died. Aaron, the brother of Moses and Miriam has also died and his son Eleazar is now the high priest. And for Moses, because he misrepresented God before the people at the waters of Meribah, he would not be allowed to enter the Promise Land but God did allow him to see the land of promise before he died from a high mountain. And just as with Aaron passing off the scene and a change of leadership in the priesthood, the same is true here with Moses. God raised up Joshua to bring the children of Israel into the Promise Land, he will shepherd the children of Israel as they walk by faith!

But Moses is going to deal with the Midianites and tie up some loose ends before Joshua takes completely over and Moses passes off the scene. Back in Numbers 27:18-23 we are told, **“And the Lord said to Moses: ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him — all the congregation.’ So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.”**

Until Moses died, he was still in charge but some of that authority was given to Joshua and Moses wanted the children of Israel to understand that. Like I said, before Moses died, he still had a few things to do, and his big farewell address you might say, some 34 chapters worth, called the book of Deuteronomy! With that said, let’s begin reading in Numbers chapter 31, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

NUMBERS 31**VERSES 1-2**

1. Why did God want the children of Israel to take vengeance against the Midianites?

Back in Numbers 25:1-2 we are told, **“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.”** In

other words, Balaam the prophet, not a believer, told Balak the king of Moab to send in Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel and in doing so they will be joined to Baal of Peor. You see, many of the pagan worship practices centered on sexual immorality and the men of Israel fell prey to this seduction. They joined themselves to Baal of Peor and God brought His judgment upon the camp of Israel as 24,000 died in this judgment!

According to Wenham, “The Midianites were a large confederation of tribes, associated with various smaller groups . . . They roamed through the arid lands of the Sinai, the Negeb and Transjordan. Here it is those Midianites associated with Moab that are picked out for vengeance.” Thus, God was using the children of Israel as His instrument to bring judgment upon the Midianites!

2. After Moses completed this mission, we aren't sure how soon after, he would then be gathered to his people. I find that interesting because Moses was doing battle with the enemy until he was taken home. I wonder how often we think that as we get older, come to the end of our life, walking with the Lord for many years, and we think now we can relax, there won't be any more battles with the enemy. Folks, how wrong that is. The battle will continue until we go home to be with the Lord and that is the only time it will end!

Paul put it like this regarding his battle with the enemy, with his battle with the flesh in I Corinthians 9:24-27, **“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”**

Also, in Galatians 5:16-18 Paul tells us, **“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”**

Did you notice that it first says that the flesh will lust against the Spirit; it will war against the Spirit and because of that battle the Spirit must war, do battle against the flesh.

Thus, Paul reminds us in Romans 13:11-14, “**And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**” Fill yourself up with the things of God, put on Christ!

VERSES 3-5

1. Here we see Moses organize the army of Israel who will strike God’s vengeance upon the Midianites. A total of only 12,000 soldiers, 1,000 men from each of the 12 tribes of Israel excluding the tribe of Levi for they were not to go to war, except for Phinehas, he will lead them in this battle.

VERSES 6-11

1. Why was Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, with the holy articles, maybe the Ark of the Covenant, to go into this battle? I thought the priests were not to go to war? This was a spiritual battle here for the Midianites got the children of Israel to join themselves to Baal of Peor, as I have said. And if you remember, it was Phinehas who took a stand against a man named Zimri, a Simeonite who brought one of these women right by Moses and the children of Israel who were mourning at the tent of meeting over the sin of the nation, and he brings her into his tent to have sex with her. A “In your face God” move by Zimri! And Phinehas took his sword and went into this man’s tent and thrust them both through, killing them and now he is leading this battle against this nation that brought this sin into the camp of Israel!

2. Not only did the children of Israel kill all the Midianite males, but Balaam the prophet was also killed with the sword. It seems that this for profit prophet hung around Midian and as he sold out God for a profit, his victory did not last long. In Numbers 23:10 he said, “. . . **Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my end be like his!**” In reality he died the death of the wicked amongst a wicked people! I wonder if Balaam’s talking donkey was killed in this battle? He may have survived, as many were taken captive in Israel’s victory!

How many people think they can be victorious over God and in the end, everyone of them will die the death of the wicked! I will give you one example. There is this new Gay Bible that has been published that promotes homosexuality, even saying that Jesus is gay! How sad, because they and all those who go down that path, all those who reject the Jesus of the Bible, not the one they make up in their evil hearts, will die in their sins!

3. How did the children of Israel defeat the Midianites and Balaam? The sword killed them all. I believe there is a great spiritual lesson here. Paul, in Ephesians 6:17, as he speaks of our spiritual armor, tells us that we are to take up and keep ready at all times for use, **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”** Folk’s, God’s Word is our spiritual weapon to defeat the attacks of the enemy. But, tragically today many in the church have negated God’s Word and they fall prey to the attacks of the enemy! May we learn the lesson and cleave to God’s Word, using it as our spiritual weapon against the enemies we face in our lives!

VERSES 12-18

1. So as the children of Israel return with the spoils of their victory, they also brought back with them the Midianite women. And as Moses sees this he blows a gasket, he is very upset with what they have done, but why? Because it was many of these very women who seduced the men of Israel into pagan worship and immorality. Thus, Moses calls for all those women who were not virgins to be put to death!

2. Why did Moses want the young males killed also? Because they would grow up and in that culture they would avenge the death of their father's and try to perpetuate the Midianite culture. Yes, it was harsh but God's judgment is fair, it is always right and we might not see it, but He sees what will happen down the road and He deals with it now to protect the children of Israel.

3. Isn't this interesting. The children of Israel defeated the mighty army of Midian but were setting themselves up to fall prey to something they should have never got into in the first place, never let into the camp. In fact, they should have learned the lesson that just happened and what God did with this sin, but it seems that they did not. We do the same today as Christians, we fight against this cause and that cause and yet we allow into our camp things that will destroy us even though we have defeated other enemies. We, as the children of Israel need to destroy; put to death you might say those enemies. Paul warns us in I Corinthians 10:12, "**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**" Don't think you can handle it, play with it, allow it into your camp, for it will cause you to fall!

VERSES 19-20

1. They not only needed to purify themselves but also the spoils from their victory. We looked at this in Numbers chapter 19 as the ashes of the red heifer were placed in water and sprinkled upon those that were unclean and the articles that were unclean.

2. For us as Christians, we don't need the ashes of the red heifer to purify our lives. First of all there is Jesus Christ who cleanses us of all our sins and then it is the water of the Word of God that cleanses us from the dirt of this world, that daily cleaning that we need. It is as David said in Psalm 119:9-11, **“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.”** Also, Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5:26, **“that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”** Thus, don't negate God's Word, but meditate upon it and allow God's Spirit to speak to your heart!

VERSES 21-24

1. God also told them that besides the water of purification, some things would also need to go through the fire of purification. We have looked at the water of purification and how that refers to God's Word in our lives. But what does this fire of purification mean to us today? I believe the fire of purification speaks of the trials we go through. In Job 23:10 we see this as Job tells us, **“But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”** You see, the fire causes the impurities in our lives, like dross, to rise to the surface to be removed!

VERSES 25-47

1. Here we see the spoil of the victory divided up between the soldiers who went to war, the 12,000 men and the other half was divided up between the 12 tribes of Israel. For the men of war, 1 out of 500 of their spoils went to the Lord and for the rest of the nation they were to give out of their spoils 1 out of 50 to the Lord!

VERSES 48-54

1. During this battle the children of Israel went in with 12,000 men and they ended the battle with 12,000 men, not one soldier was lost! This blew them away so much that they gave the Lord an additional offering or some 420 pounds of gold! It was a thanksgiving offering you might say, thanking the Lord for seeing them all home safely from battle. Have you ever heard of a war where one side has not one casualty? Of course not, but God did it here and the children of Israel recognized it was the Lord and not them! And in the New Testament, Jesus tells us, **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.”** John 10:27-30. That should bring us great comfort and we should bring before the Lord our thanksgiving offerings!

2. And look at the spoils of this victory. Some 675,00 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys maybe even Balaam's, or some 808,000 animals plus 32,000 virgin Midianite women. Not too bad!

3. Let me set the stage for what we will be looking at in Numbers chapter 32. In Mark chapter 5 Jesus and His men have crossed over the Sea of Galilee and they come to the area of the Gadarenes. It is an area that had Jewish pig farmers, which was not kosher! And it is here that Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man who was violent. And as Jesus approached this man the demons recognized Jesus and they asked Jesus to cast them into the herd of Swine instead of being tormented before the time of judgment. And Jesus did just that, he cast them into these swine as He freed this man from his demon-possession!

Now you would think that the community would be excited about this, a man in bondage set free, but they are not. They are upset and they want Jesus to get out of town for destroying their pig industry, which was illegal for the Jew! You see, once these demons were cast into these pigs they ran off the cliff into the Sea of Galilee, killing them. And of course, this is the first reported case of deviled ham! Sorry. Thus, they wanted Jesus out of town, to leave them alone. Now, why was there this thriving pig industry on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, on the east side of the Jordan River? Who were these Jewish people and what were they doing there? I believe that we are told who they are in Numbers chapter 32.

NUMBERS 32**VERSES 1-5**

1. Here we see Reuben, Gad and we will see that the half tribe of Manasseh wants to remain on the east side of the Jordan River. They don't want to enter the Promise Land. And I believe it is their descendants, years later of course, who remain in this land on the east side of the Jordan River involved in this pig industry. Now, why do they want to remain here and not enter into the Promise Land? Because they were happy with the fertile land that was before them and they were content to stay outside of the land that God had promised them. Of this, Wenham wrote the following in regards to what they were requesting, "That any Israelite tribe should consider settling outside the land promised to Abraham showed a disturbing indifference to the divine word, the word on which Israel's existence entirely depended."

2. How many Christians today are satisfied in their Christian walk, not wanting to go any further, not wanting to grow, to walk by faith and instead live on the outskirts of the faith. Folks we should always be pressing forward in the will of God and always want to grow in the Lord. Paul, that great man of God had this to say in Philippians 3:12-14, **“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** This spiritual giant was not satisfied in his spiritual life, and thus, he pressed on, he moved forward, he kept reaching for that upward calling in his life. How about you?

VERSES 6-7

1. Moses is preparing to die and look at these battles he is still facing. Moses is concerned that their action will discourage the rest of the nation from entering into the Promise Land. In fact, Moses reminds them that there is still a battle ahead of them and now these 2½ tribes were going to sit out, being content with where they were. Moses wants them to understand that this ungodly contentment did not negate them of their duties of going into battle with the rest of the nation.

2. Here’s the problem for us as Christians. You may want to press on, go deeper in your walk with the Lord but if you hang around those believers who are content where they are at, those that don’t want to press on, you will find out that complacency is contagious!

VERSES 8-15

1. Here is why Moses is so concerned. Some 38 years or so earlier 10 spies brought back a bad report regarding the Promise Land and it discouraged the entire nation from entering in. And because of their unbelief, that generation all died in the wilderness. Now Moses sees this happening all over again and it is even worse because it is not just 10 people but 2½ tribes that would discourage the people this time. And if this happens then God will destroy this generation and maybe another 40 years before the next generation can enter in! And yes, these tribes made a bad decision that would affect them, but now their actions were going to affect the entire nation and Moses is stepping in to stop it. Folks, you can't force people to grow in the Lord but you can prevent them from affecting others to become stagnant in their walk!

VERSES 16-19

1. These tribes said that they would go and fight with their brethren and when the battle is over they will then return home on the east side of the Jordan River. But notice that their children will be in **“fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land.”** There was no protection from the enemy except inside these walls and they were preventing their children from going forward in the Lord!

VERSES 20-24

1. As Moses hears what they have to say he agrees to their request as long as what they promised, they fulfill. That promise was that they would go to war with their brethren and fight with them, which would encourage the rest of the nation. If they don't, then their sin will find them out. In fact, we will read that if they don't help, they will be required to leave this land and enter the Promise Land!

VERSES 25-27

1. So only the men of war from these 2½ tribes will go to war with the children of Israel. Their families, their children will remain on the east side of the Jordan River. Folks, if you want your family, your children to do well, take them with you, don't leave them on the outskirts of the Promise Land!

VERSES 28-42

1. These 2½ tribes that remained on the east side of the Jordan River, outside the Promise Land, were the first tribes taken into captivity years later because they did not have the defense of the Jordan River or the help of the other 9½ tribes plus the Levites.

2. Let me say this. I have been in ministry a long time and I have seen this played out in people's lives over and over again. There are those Christians who live by themselves, not plugged into a church, no body of believers to be around and they will find themselves in captivity. God's desire is that you are part of a body of believers, part of the body of Christ. And it is interesting because when you ask these people, "How are you doing? How's your walk?" Most every time they will say, "It's great! Everything is fine!" Liar!

First of all Paul tells us in Hebrews 10:24-25, "**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**" You see, you are not to forsake the assembling together of a body of believers; you are to be part of the local church. Secondly, you are not using your gifts that God has given you to edify, build up the body of Christ. So those are just two areas you are being disobedient to God and thus, your walk is not right! And, you have placed yourself outside the protection of the body of Christ, of a fellowship. How important that is for us to understand!

NUMBERS 33

VERSES 1-2

1. Moses is now recounting their 40-year journey from Egypt to the boarder of the Promise Land, waiting to enter in.

VERSES 3-4

1. On that first Passover the Angel of death came upon the land of Egypt destroying all the firstborn in the land. Only those who sacrificed the lamb and applied the blood to the door of their home were spared from this plague. And as the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, the children of Israel were set free from their bondage in Egypt and they left with great spoils, the Egyptians just wanted them to go. And they began their journey on the 15th day of Nisan.

2. Yes, the plagues came upon the Egyptians, ten of them because they refused to let the children of Israel go and God brought judgment upon them. And He also brought judgment upon the gods they worshiped in each plague! You can check out our Exodus study on the plagues and see this played out.

VERSES 5-15

1. Moses now tells us that they journeyed from Egypt through the Red Sea to Mount Sinai. They spent about 1 year at Mount Sinai before they moved on and there at this location God gave to Moses the Law and other instructions for the children of Israel including the building of this portable worship structure, the sacrifices and-so-on.

2. Now, in regards to this Red Sea crossing. Many feel that the children of Israel crossed by the Sea of Reeds, by the Gulf of Suez, which is only a few inches deep. And the idea here is that if the wind blew just right it could move the water aside and thus, the children of Israel could cross over on dry land, in a sense, the ground would still be moist. That is just plain foolishness. Notice what it says, in verse 8, that they “**passed through the midst of the Sea into the wilderness.**” Now when I cross through a puddle, I don’t say that I am passing through the midst of that puddle, which would be silly and so is this idea of them passing through the Sea of Reeds.

Not only that, but in Psalm 106:9 we are told, “**He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up; So He led them through the depths, As through the wilderness.**” Notice that they went through “**the depths**” of the Red Sea, not a puddle. Also, in Psalm 66:6 we are told, “**He turned the sea into dry land; They went through the river on foot. There we will rejoice in Him.**” The land they crossed on, in the midst of the Sea was dry, not moist sand! And in Isaiah 51:10 we are told, “**Are You not the One who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; That made the depths of the sea a road For the redeemed to cross over?**”

You see, they did not cross over by the Gulf of Suez or the Sea of Reeds like many believe and teach because they were still in Egyptian-controlled territory and the Bible says that they moved out of that area. I believe they crossed through the Red Sea by the Gulf of Aqaba, in Saudi Arabia. There, at this location there is a sandy beach that would have been wide enough to hold the children of Israel, all of them. It was some 4.25 miles long and 2 miles wide and thus, they could have encamped by this Sea before they crossed through it!

Also, at this site in the middle of the Red Sea, there is a sand bar almost a mile wide at its summit and it slopes gently at six degrees until midway across the Gulf, where it is 900 feet below Sea level. And then it rises to the eastern or Midian shore at that same gentle angle, meeting our standards for handicap assessable. Thus, if the Sea was opened, they could cross over on this sand bar and I believe that is exactly what happened. And keep in mind, as the Sea opened up there would be walls of water some 1,000 feet in the air on each side and God dried the land for them to cross over on! Don't negate the miracle of God because you don't believe in miracles or you have to figure out how God did it!

And also, we are told in Exodus 14:23-31, **“And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.’ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.’ And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.”**

Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.” In an instant the entire Egyptian army was drowned, 250,000 of them, not in a few inches of water, which would be a miracle, but as these 1,000-foot walls of water came crashing down upon them! So I believe that the Red Sea crossing was by the Gulf of Aqaba in Saudi Arabia just as the Scriptures tell us. In fact, that is where Mount Sinai was located as Paul makes that point in Galatians 4:25 when he said, **“for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia . . .”**

VERSES 16-49

1. Here we see Moses speak of all the places they went to from Mount Sinai to the shores of the Jordan River. This part of their journey took some 38 years and it was not that the journey was long, the distance was long, but it was because of unbelief!

VERSES 50-53

1. This once again seems like a cruel act by God, to destroy the Canaanites, to remove these pagan practices from the land. Back in Genesis 15:14 God gave these people 400 years to repent, to turn from their wicked ways and they kept going down this path that was leading to destruction. And now the judgment of God was upon them and if you study the history of the Canaanites, not from the Bible but secular sources, you will see their wickedness. They were involved in demonic worship, the sacrificing of their children to these gods, the sexual immorality and-so-on. They were truly ripe for God's judgment; their iniquity was now complete!

VERSES 54-56

1. God warns the children of Israel to destroy these people or they will infect you with their poison. Think of the Canaanites as a rabid dog. You don't let the dog in your house, you don't let that dog play with your children, the dog is sick and he will infect anyone who comes in contact with him. The only solution to protect you is to destroy that dog and the same was true here with the Canaanites! And for Israel, they did not fully obey the Lord but allowed them to live in the land and they were affected and infected with their poison, so much so that God removed the children of Israel from the land in judgment for a time, bringing them into captivity because of their idolatry that was picked up from the Canaanites!

2. We need to be careful we don't allow corrupt practices to come into our lives or into the church because it will affect and infect us with its poison and bring us into captivity just as it did the nation of Israel. God warns us and then it is up to us to listen and obey. If you don't, like the Lord said to the children of Israel, these things will be a thorn in your life! As Paul said in Romans 6:6-7, "**knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.**" Don't allow that garbage to be resurrected in your life, be free in Christ!