

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Short-time in the Dessert”

NUMBERS 26 - 29

Introduction

Ever been short-time at a job? You’ve already given your notice, or (in some cases) been given notice, that you’re through after a certain date. It’s hard to get motivated.

Unless you’re serving God! Moses was a short-timer. He had been told by God that he would not lead the children of Israel into the land.

But he wasn’t through. Moses had four additional responsibilities to perform before his work was done and the Lord took Him to Paradise to await the coming of Jesus. The first was to take a census – to number the soldiers – which he did in verses one through fifty-one of chapter twenty-six.

Numbers 26:1 And it came to pass, after the plague, that the Lord spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying:

Numbers 26:2 “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers’ houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel.”

Numbers 26:3 So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from Jericho*, saying:

Numbers 26:4 “*Take a census of the people* from twenty years old and above, just as the Lord commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt.”

(Skip to verse fifty-one...)

Numbers 26:51 *These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty.*

During this period, certain tribes suffered significant gains, and certain tribes suffered significant losses. Of these twelve tribes of Israel, five suffered loss, and seven gained men. Half of the tribes had gains or losses of 15% or less; but Simeon lost 63% of their population, and Manasseh gained 64%. God was blessing or cursing

particular tribes, no doubt related to their abiding with Him.

God could have sent angels to clean up Canaan instantly; or a plague; or a disaster. But He chose to work through human beings, one day at a time. God is certainly long-suffering toward His people, and we ought to count it a great privilege to know Him and be able to work with Him in doing His work.

It was “not by might, nor by power” that they would conquer; it was “by God’s Spirit.” Still, they took a census and they fought in an orderly, organized way. God is orderly and organized; so should we be!

Moses’ second task was to prepare them for their inheritance in the land. You read about that from verse fifty-two into chapter twenty-seven, verse eleven. The words “inherit” or “inheritance” are used twelve times in this section. Though he wasn’t allowed to go in himself, Moses invested the closing weeks of his life in preparing the new generation to enter Canaan and claim the land God promised to give them.

Moses spoke first of their tribal inheritance:

Numbers 26:52 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 26:53 “To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names.

Numbers 26:54 To a large *tribe* you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small *tribe* you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them.

Numbers 26:55 But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers.

Numbers 26:56 According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.”

Once the land had been conquered and God had given His people rest, Joshua, Eleazar, and the ten tribal representatives would cast lots to determine each tribe’s portion of the land. Casting lots always bothers us – as if it’s random or left to chance. The lot was decided by God. the lot was cast for determining the section of the country in which each tribe should be located - not the quantity of their possessions. In other words, when the lot had decided that a

particular tribe was to be settled in the north or the south, the east or the west, the extent of territory was allocated according to the rule

According to the record in the Book of Joshua, some of the tribes gladly accepted their inheritance and went to work making it “home,” some complained about the land they were given, and some went out and conquered more territory.

Next was the inheritance of the tribe of Levi:

Numbers 26:57 And these *are* those who were numbered of the Levites according to their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites.

Numbers 26:58 These *are* the families of the Levites: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, and the family of the Korathites. And Kohath begot Amram.

Numbers 26:59 The name of Amram’s wife was Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam.

Numbers 26:60 To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

Numbers 26:61 And Nadab and Abihu died when they offered profane fire before the Lord.

Numbers 26:62 Now those who were numbered of them were twenty-three thousand, every male from a month old and above; for they were not numbered among the other children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given to them among the children of Israel.

The Levites were not given their own territory to possess but were scattered throughout the nation in forty-eight assigned cities. There were at least three reasons for this procedure:

1. First, scattering the Levites fulfilled Jacob’s deathbed prophecy that Levi’s descendants would be distributed throughout the land. Levi and Simeon had been violent in their treatment of the people of Shechem, and Jacob felt it would be safer if the sons of Levi were widely dispersed.
2. Second, by scattering throughout the land, the Levites had a better opportunity to teach the Law to more people and influence them to be faithful to the Lord. Parents were obligated to teach their children God’s Word, but it was the responsibility of the priests and Levites to teach the people the meaning of God’s Law and the blessing of obeying it.

3. The third reason the Levites were not allowed to inherit property was that God was their inheritance. They were privileged to serve God by assisting the priests, and they shared in the sacrifices and tithes that the people brought to the Lord. The Levites were to devote themselves wholly to the service of the Lord and His people and to live by faith, receiving what they needed from God's hand through His people.

Next was the family inheritance:

Numbers 27:1 Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these *were* the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

Numbers 27:2 And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, *by* the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying:

Numbers 27:3 "Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the Lord, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons.

Numbers 27:4 Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers."

Numbers 27:5 So Moses brought their case before the Lord.

Numbers 27:6 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 27:7 "The daughters of Zelophehad speak *what is* right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them.

Numbers 27:8 And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter.

Numbers 27:9 If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers.

Numbers 27:10 If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers.

Numbers 27:11 And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it."

And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

Maintaining the inheritance from generation to generation was important to each family and to the tribes to which the families belonged. As with the other nations of that day, Israel was a strongly masculine society, and fathers left their property to their sons. The

eldest son received two-thirds of the inheritance and the other sons divided the remaining one-third. If a man didn't have a son, he left his estate to his nearest male relative, but not to a daughter. When a daughter was married, she received a dowry from her father and would no longer live in the family home. The dowry was her inheritance.

The five daughters of Zelophehad, of the tribe of Manasseh, thought that this law of inheritance was unfair, and they asked Moses, Eleazar, the tribal princes, and the whole congregation to consider changing it. Why should their father's name be blotted out of Israel because of something over which he had no control? Should his family be penalized because he had no son?

Being a wise man, Moses took the matter to the Lord. The Lord agreed with the five women and decreed that a father who had no son could leave his estate to his daughter. If he had neither son nor daughter, he could pass the land on to his nearest male relative.

The decision to allow daughters to inherit solved one problem but created another one, and the leaders of the tribe of Manasseh called it to the attention of Moses. If a daughter who had inherited her father's land married into another tribe, this would take the land away from the original tribe and make it part of her husband's estate. At the Year of Jubilee, it could not return to the original family, and this would rob a tribe of its property.

Moses must have taken the matter to the Lord, because he replied "according to the word of the Lord." The solution was to require daughters who had the inheritance to marry men who belonged to their own tribe. This simple procedure would permit the daughters to marry but would at the same time keep family property in the original tribe. The five sisters obeyed the edict and each one married a cousin.

The remarkable thing about these laws is that they are all made in anticipation - in faith - of coming into the inheritance of land in Canaan. That this was a real issue - at this time - for the daughters of Zelophehad shows they were real women of faith.

To the Jews in Canaan, possessing land was the foundation for building a family, earning an income, and having security and the necessities of life. The ideal life for an Old Testament Jew was to own his own land and be able to sit under his own fig tree and enjoy his family and the fruit of his labor.

Moses' third task was dedicating a new leader – his successor. Before we see it, there is a brief autobiographical moment:

Numbers 27:12 Now the Lord said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel.

Numbers 27:13 And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered.

Numbers 27:14 For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes." (These *are* the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)

Because Moses and Aaron had not honored the Lord at Meribah, they weren't permitted to enter the Promised Land with the new generation. Moses repeatedly asked God for permission to enter the land, but the Lord refused to relent. Not only must Moses be disciplined because of his pride and anger at Meribah, but he must not mar the type that would be expounded in the Book of Hebrews. It isn't the Law (Moses) that gives us our spiritual inheritance but Jesus.

After Moses delivered the messages recorded in Deuteronomy, he was permitted to ascend Mount Nebo (Pisgah), in the Abarim mountain range, and view the land that Israel would inherit. Centuries later, Moses and Elijah would stand in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration when they talked with Jesus about His impending death on the cross; so he did finally make it to the Promised Land.

Choosing Joshua:

Numbers 27:15 Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying:

Numbers 27:16 "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,

Numbers 27:17 who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

Numbers 27:18 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;
Numbers 27:19 set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.
Numbers 27:20 And you shall give *some* of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.
Numbers 27:21 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."
Numbers 27:22 So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation.
Numbers 27:23 And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

It was certainly no surprise that Joshua was the man God chose to take Moses' place, for Joshua had worked closely with Moses since the nation left Egypt. He led the Jewish army in defeating the Amalekites, and he ministered as Moses' servant, even going up Sinai with Moses when God gave the Law. As one of the twelve spies, he joined with Caleb in encouraging the people to enter the land. He was filled with the Spirit and had been disciplined in the rigors of Egyptian slavery and the wilderness march. In every way, he was a perfect successor to Moses.

One of the responsibilities of Christian leaders today is to see to it that the next generation is equipped to carry on the work.

Moses' final task was to focus their attention on worship. From the beginning of their national life, the secret of Israel's success was a relationship to the Lord characterized by faith and obedience. The Jews were God's covenant people, chosen by Him to do His will and ultimately bring the Redeemer into the world. Once Israel was settled in the land, they had to be careful to follow these instructions carefully, for they worshiped the Lord God Almighty.

Some of the instructions given in chapters twenty-eight and twenty-nine had already been given at Sinai, while others were new. The basis for their worship was the calendar of special days outlined in Leviticus 23, beginning with the weekly Sabbath and ending with the annual Feast of Tabernacles. The phrase "sweet savour" in the KJV, used seven times in these two chapters, is translated "an aroma

pleasing to Me” in the NIV. Each of the offerings had a different purpose to fulfill, but the ultimate goal was to please the Lord and delight His heart. God seeks for true worshipers and delights in the worship of His loving people.

In the interest of time, and since much here is repetition, I’ll give you a summary:

28:1-10 Discusses the **daily sacrifices**. Each morning and each evening, the priests were to offer a lamb as a burnt offering. The new instruction was that on the Sabbath days they were to offer two lambs each morning and evening. The burnt offering typified total dedication to the Lord, and we should begin and end each day by giving ourselves completely to the Lord. The Christian life is a “continual burnt offering,” except that we are *living* sacrifices not dead ones.

28:11-15 Discusses the **monthly offerings**. This was a new instruction to the priests. The Jewish people followed a lunar calendar and “**new moon**” was joyfully celebrated by the nation as a whole as well as by individual families. The beginning of the month was known, not by astronomical calculations, but, according to Jewish writers, by the testimony of messengers appointed to watch the first visible appearance of the new moon; and then the fact was announced through the whole country by signal-fires kindled on the mountain tops, and the trumpets were blown.

On the first of every month, along with the daily continual burnt offering, the priests were to offer an additional burnt offering comprised of two young bulls, a ram, and seven male lambs a year old, along with the proper meal offerings and drink offerings. A male goat was also sacrificed as a sin offering. Israel was to make a new beginning with each new month.

28:16 – 29:40 Discusses **annual religious events**. Five different annual events are named here, starting with Passover. For believers today, these special annual events speak of Christ and what He has done for us:

1. Passover (28:16-25) celebrated Israel's exodus from Egypt and also marked the beginning of the nation's religious year. On the fourteenth day of the month, the head of each household brought a lamb to be slain and later roasted and eaten, but on the fifteenth day, the priests had to offer on the altar sacrifices identical to those offered at new moon: A burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs, plus a male goat for a sin offering. Identical sacrifices were repeated each day for a week, during which time the Jews celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread and removed all traces of yeast from their homes. For the Christian believer, Passover speaks of the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. Yeast is a picture of sin, and God's redeemed people must put sin out of their lives and be a holy people.
2. Pentecost (28:26-30) was celebrated fifty days after Passover, counting from the Feast of Firstfruits, which was the day after the Sabbath following Passover. The priest offered sacrifices identical to those offered for new moon and Passover. Christians celebrate it as the day when the promised Holy Spirit came and filled them with power for ministry. Pentecost is the birthday of the church.
3. The Feast of Trumpets (29:1-6). The blowing of the trumpets on the first day of the seventh month signaled the beginning of a new civil year for Israel. On that day the Jews were not to work and the priests were to offer a burnt offering of one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs, as well as a sin offering of one male goat. Today, the Jews are a scattered people, but one day the trumpet will sound to call them back to their land and prepare them for the return of their Messiah. The trumpet sound that Christians are awaiting will announce the return of the Savior for His church.
4. The Day of Atonement (29:7-11) was Israel's highest and holiest day, when the people fasted and abstained from all work. The priest offered sacrifices identical to those offered on the first day of the month. He also offered sacrifices for himself. This was the only day of the year when the high priest was permitted to go beyond the veil into the holy of holies, but he had to bring with him burning incense and sacrificial blood. The ritual on the Day of Atonement pictures the work of Jesus Christ when He died on the cross for our sins.
5. The Feast of Tabernacles (29:12-39) began five days after the Day of Atonement and lasted for a week. During that week, the

priests offered over 200 sacrifices, including the daily burnt offerings (2 lambs) which were doubled on the Sabbath. This feast looks forward to the time when God will fulfill the kingdom promises made to Israel and the nation will rejoice in their bountiful beautiful land.

Conclusion

Numbers 29:40 So Moses told the children of Israel everything, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

“Everything” means everything that they needed to know to love and serve the Lord. He’s told **you** “everything,” too; it’s all in the Person and work of Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture by the Spirit.