

# Exposition of the Book of Numbers

Sunset Bible Church Adult Sunday School 2021

## Week 6: A New Generation (Numbers 25-27)

*“For the Lord had said of them, “They shall die in the wilderness.” Not one of them was left, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.” – Numbers 27:65*

### Outline of the Class/Book

- Week 6: A New Generation (26-27)
- Week 7: Offerings and Holy Days (28-30)
- Week 8: Preparation to Enter the Promised Land (31-33)
- Week 9: Cities and Boundaries (34-36); Conclusion

### Opening Discussion:

- What did you notice or observe as you read that you had not noticed before? What stood out to you?
- How do these chapters describe God? What can we learn about God in these chapters? How is He portrayed?
- What questions do you still have about the text? What didn't make sense?

## Rebellion Cycle 3: From Zin to Moab (20:1-25:19)

### The Final Rebellion (25:1-19):

- **Sin with the Moabite Women:** In Shittim, the people began to commit sexual immorality and idolatry with women from Moab. Idolatry and sexual immorality are closely linked in the ancient world. Sex with temple prostitutes was one way that people would incite the gods to fertility and the resulting fruitfulness of the land and the womb. In the Old Testament, God is decidedly not a sexual being – a major difference from the beliefs of most (all?) of Israel's neighbors. This sin brought about the anger of YHWH against Israel (which later is revealed to have indicated the commencement of a plague).
- **Spiritual result of the sin with the Moabite women:** After committing sexual immorality and idolatry, Israel is said to have “yoked” itself to Baal of Peor. Although, by rights and covenant, Israel belongs to YHWH, they have now enslaved themselves to a false god.
- **Punishment:** YHWH told Moses to arrest the leaders of the people and hang (impale) them in broad daylight so that his wrath would be turned against them. Moses told the judges to execute the men responsible. This does not seem to have been immediately carried out.
- **Weeping:** The “weeping” of the children of Israel does not indicate repentance but participation in a pagan ritual.<sup>1</sup> This represents an escalation in the sins of Israel, from sexual immorality, to participating in a pagan feast, to bowing down to a false god to

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 1st Edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993). 519-520

participating in religious rituals for a pagan god. The defiant action that follows represents, as Ashley calls it, the “last straw.”

- **Phinehas:** Then an Israelite (a Simeonite) brought a Midianite woman (the daughter of a clan leader of Midian) to his brothers in plain view of Moses and the community (while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting). When Phinehas (the son of Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron) saw it, he followed the man into the tent, took a javelin, and thrust it through them both. This stopped the plague that was upon Israel.
- **YHWH’s Response:** Phineas’ action YHWH told Moses, brought atonement to Israel for their sin. Furthermore He established a special covenant of peace with Phinehas and his descendants. YHWH commanded Moses to destroy Midian because of their treachery.

### A New Generation (26:1-36:13)

#### The Second Census (26:1-65)

- **Census Instructions (26:1-4):** YHWH told Moses to take a census of all of Israel twenty years and older according to their fathers’ houses.
- **Census Results (26:5-51)**
  - Reuben: 43,730 (-2,770 from previous census). The text includes a reminder of the 250 that died when the earth swallowed them up, put here because two of the ringleaders were Reubenites.
  - Simeon: 22,200 (-37,100). The massive loss here may be related to the plague of chapter 25. The man who was killed by Phinehas was a Simeonite who seemed to take a leading role in the sins being committed. A full clan has disappeared from the previous census.
  - Gad: 40,500 (-5,150)
  - Judah: 76,500 (+1,900)
  - Issachar: 64,300 (+9,900)
  - Zebulun: 60,500 (+3,100)
  - Manasseh: 52,700 (+20,500). The daughters of Zelophehad are named here, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They will receive inheritance as if they were sons of Zelophehad who had only daughters. This anticipates their petition that follows in the text.
  - Ephraim: 32,500 (-8,000)
  - Benjamin: 45,600 (+10,200)
  - Dan: 64,400 (+1,700)
  - Asher: 53,400 (+11,900). Asher’s daughter Serah is listed here for reasons unknown.
  - Naphtali: 45,400 (-8,000)
  - Total: 601,730 (-1,820)
- **Division of the Land (26:52-56):** YHWH told Moses to divide the land for inheritance in proportion to the size of the tribe. The actual location of each tribe will be divided by lot.
- **Census of the Levites (26:57-62):** The number of the Levites was not included with the other tribes because they do not inherit land in Israel. Their number was 23,000. There is also included a history of Moses’ family. The text makes a point of the fact that both

of Moses and Aaron's parents, Jochebed and Amram, were Levites, thus indicating a "pure" line. Jochebed bore Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, but Nadab and Abihu died when they offered unauthorized fire before YHWH.

- **Conclusion (26:63-65):** These numbers were listed by Moses and Eleazar the priest at the plains of Moab by the Jordan. There was not one person listed by Moses and Aaron who had been counted in the wilderness of Sinai except Caleb and Joshua.

### **The Daughter of Zelophehad (27:1-11):**

- **The petition (27:1-4):** The daughters of Zelophehad, from the tribe of Manasseh, approached Moses and Eleazar with a petition to inherit land from their father. Their father died in the wilderness but what not among those who died in the rebellion of Korah but died for his own sin (probably referring to his being a member of the "rebellious generation"). But, because he died without sons, he is at risk of losing his name and line. The daughters ask that they be allowed to inherit among their father's brothers.
- **YHWH's Response (27:5-11):** Moses brought this case before YHWH who affirmed the rightness of the petition of Zelophehad's daughters. YHWH commands that they be given a possession of the land that would have gone to their father. This leads to a permanent ordinance that if a man dies without sons, the inheritance is to be transferred to his daughter. If he has no daughter, it is to be transferred to his brother. If he has no brothers, it goes to his fathers' brothers and if there are none, to his closest relative. The text will return to this episode in chapter 36 with some further clarification and stipulations to ensure that land does not transfer from one tribe to another with marriage.

### **Joshua Succeeds Moses (27:12-23)**

- **Reminder of Moses' Sin (27:12-14):** YHWH told Moses to go up to the mountain of Abarim and see the land before he is gathered to his people. He will not enter the land because he rebelled against His word in the wilderness and failed to uphold Him as holy in front of the congregation.
- **Moses asks for a new leader (27:15-17):** Moses asks YHWH to appoint a successor to lead the congregation so that they will not be "sheep without a shepherd."
  - **YHWH, the God of the spirits of all flesh.** This phrase/name of God is used only here and in Numbers 16:22 (during the rebellion of Korah). According to Cole, in emphasizes YHWH's sovereignty over all mankind.<sup>2</sup> It also anticipates the need to appoint a man with the right "Spirit," as Joshua has.<sup>3</sup>
- **YHWH Chooses Joshua (27:18-23):** YHWH told Moses to take Joshua, the son of Nun, "a man in whom is the Spirit" and to lay his hand on him and invest in him "some of" his authority. Joshua is to stand before Eleazar and the congregation and be

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis R. Cole, *Numbers: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 2000). Pg. 468

<sup>3</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019). Pg. 579

commissioned by Moses. Moses is to invest him with some of his authority and the people are to obey him. Moses did as YHWH commanded and commissioned Joshua.

- **A man in whom is the spirit:** The “spirit” on Joshua is not temporary as elsewhere, but a permanent quality of leadership.
- **Hand... hands:** YHWH told Moses to lay his hand on Joshua, but the text records that Moses laid his hands (plural) on Joshua. The eleventh century Jewish interpreter, Rashi, notices this and sees it as an indication of Moses’ generosity towards Joshua in giving of “all of his spirit” rather than a “part.”<sup>4</sup> Despite this, Joshua’s authority does seem to be less than that of Moses.
- **Joshua’s authority:** YHWH’s instruction to invest in Joshua “some of your authority” seems to be an indication of a change in not only the identity of the leader but how authority will be exercised. Here the Urim is mentioned for the first time in the context of making decisions and seems to indicate how Joshua’s authority differs from that of Moses. Moses speaks to God directly, but Joshua will go through the priest to inquire of the Urim and the Thummim to know the will of YHWH.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Final Discussion (if times allows):**

- What is (y)our relationship to these chapters? What can be applied to your individual context, our context as an American church, and/or our context as the Church?
- What can you learn from these chapters about how to live in a way that is pleasing and honoring to God?

#### **Reading Numbers Together:**

- Week of 8/22: Numbers 28-30
- Week of 8/29: Numbers 31-33
- Week of 9/5: Numbers 34-36

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 579-580

<sup>5</sup> Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*. 554