

# Numbers 17 - 25: Moses' Outburst and Balaam's Donkey

## INTRODUCTION.

- A. In the last lesson, we saw examples of the Israel rebelling against the Lord. It would seem that after such great show of power and authority, the Israelites would have learned not to complain and to obey. However, as this study will show, this is a lesson the Israelites were not quick to learn.
- B. The book of Numbers covers a time frame of almost 39 years. The book of Numbers begins with the last 20 days at Mount Sinai and ends with Israel in the plains of Moab in the fortieth year of Israel's wanderings.
- C. The book of Numbers is a book of twos: two generations (1:1-10:10), two numberings (1, 26), two journeys (10-14, 21-27), and two sets of instructions (5-9, 28-36). This book shows the kindness and mercy of God as well as the severity of God.
- D. With this lesson, we will examine chapters 13-25 to see what lessons we can learn from this history of God's people.

## I. REAFFIRMING THE PRIESTHOOD AND ESTABLISHING RULES. (17:1-19:22)

- A. The Lord showed the Israelites that Aaron and the tribe of Levi were chosen for the priesthood. As a result of the Lord's choice, no one had any authority or right to complain against Aaron. (17:1-13)
  - 1. The Lord told Moses to have the leaders from each tribe bring a rod to Moses. Moses then put the rods in the tabernacle of witness. (vs 1-7)
  - 2. On the next day, the rod of Aaron budded and yielded ripe almonds. (vs 8-9)
  - 3. The Lord instructed Moses to put Aaron's rod before the testimony or the tablets of stone. The rod of Aaron was to be a reminder to all that would consider rebelling against the Lord. (vs 10-11)
  - 4. The people were very disturbed, being afraid to even approach the tent. (vs 12-13)
- B. The Lord established rules for the priesthood. (18:1-32)
  - 1. The Lord gave the priesthood the responsibility of making intercession for the people when they transgressed the Law of God. (vs 1-7)
  - 2. The priests were to be supported by taking portions of the sacrifices and offerings brought to the Lord. The Levites would not be given any land inheritance. (vs 8-25)
  - 3. The tribe of Levi was to offer a tenth of what they received to the Lord as an offering. The offering made to the Lord was to be given to Aaron the priest.

(vs 25-32)

- C. The Lord gave instructions for preparing the water of purification and the purpose for the water of purification. (19:1-22)

## **II. THE PEOPLE COMPLAIN AND MOSES SINNED AGAINST THE LORD. (20:1-21:35)**

- A. The Israelites traveled to the Wilderness of Zin and stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died and was buried in Kadesh. The people complained about having no water. The Lord gave Moses instructions for getting water for the Israelites. (20:1-12)
  - 1. The people complained about not having any water. They accused Moses and Aaron of leading them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. (vs 2-6)
  - 2. The Lord told Moses to speak to the rock and water would flow from the rock. (vs 7-8)
  - 3. Moses took the rod and struck the rock twice with his rod. Water came out from the rock. (vs 9-11)
  - 4. The Lord told Moses and Aaron that they would not take the Israelites into the promise land because they did not hallow the Lord in the eyes of the Israelites. They had disobeyed the Lord. This was the water of Meribah. (vs 12-13)
- B. Moses petitioned the king of Edom to travel though his land. The king of Edom refused their petition. (20:14-21)
- C. The Israelites journeyed from Kadesh to Mount Hor. Here at Mount Hor, the Lord told Moses and Aaron that Aaron would not enter into the promise land. He would be gathered to his people. This was a consequence to Aaron disobeying the Lord at the water of Meribah. Moses put Aaron's garments on Aaron's son, Eleazar as commanded by the Lord. The congregation mourned thirty days for Aaron. (20:22-29)
- D. The king of Arad attacked the Israelites when he heard that they were traveling on the road to Atharim. The king took some of the Israelites as prisoners. The Israelites made a vow to the Lord that if the Lord would deliver the Canaanites into their hands, then they would destroy the cities. The Lord listened to the Israelites and gave them victory. (21:1-3)
- E. The Israelites resumed their journey going around the land of Edom. As a result of the detour, the Israelites became discouraged and started complaining. Because of their complaining, the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people. Many people were bit and many people died. (21:4-6)
- F. The people asked Moses to petition the Lord on their behalf. The Lord instructed Moses to make a serpent and put it up on a pole. Moses fashioned a bronze serpent

and put it up on a pole. Any person who had been bitten by a snake could look upon the bronze serpent and be healed. (21:7-9)

- G. The Israelites resumed their travels. After several stops, the Israelites found their way to the top of Pisgah. At this point, Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, requesting permission to pass through his territory. (21:10-22)
- H. Sihon refused their request. Sihon took his people and attacked Israel. Israel defeated Sihon and his people. Israel took the cities of the Amorites in Heshbon. (21:23-32)
- I. The Israelites turned and went up by the way of Bashan. Og, king of Bashan attacked the Israelites. Just as with Sihon, the Lord gave Israel victory in battle and they took possession of the land. (21:33-35)

### **III. THE STORY OF BALAAM. (22:1-24:25)**

- A. The Israelites moved to the plains of Moab and set up camp on the side of the Jordan. (22:1)
- B. Balak, the king of the Moabites, saw what the Israelites had done to the Amorites. Balak was afraid for his people. Balak sent messengers to Balaam at Pethor to come and curse the Israelites. (22:2-6)
- C. The messengers traveled to see Balaam and issued the king's request to Balaam. Balaam consulted with God and God told Balaam that he was to neither go with these messengers nor was he to curse the Israelites. Balaam sent the men on their way. (22:7-14)
- D. Balak sent princes back to Balaam to offer another petition. These men offered Balaam great honor for coming back with them. Balaam explained that he could not go beyond the word of God. He again consulted with God. This time the Lord told Balaam to go with these men only if the men came to call him and he was to only speak what the Lord would tell him. Balaam arose in the morning and went with the princes of Moab. (22:15-21)
- E. The Lord's anger was aroused because Balaam went with the princes of Moab. The Lord used an angel to enforce the message that Balaam was only to speak what the Lord would command him. (22:22-41)
  - 1. Why was the Lord angry with Balaam since He had told Balaam to go? There are at least two different answers to consider.
    - a. The Pulpit Commentary offers the following thought: "It is true that God had given him permission to go, but that very permission was a judicial act whereby God punished the covetous and disobedient longings of Balaam in allowing him to have his own way." (The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. II, pg 292)

- b. E. M. Zerr takes a different approach. He writes about verse 20, “It is important to note carefully the proviso which the Lord placed under the order to go with the men. That was, “if the men come to call thee.” That would mean that the men might become so eager to see the wish of their king succeed that they would not wait till morning but would come to him in his slumber and insist on his going with them. If that takes place, then he might go.” Zerr continues by saying about verse 22, “God’s anger was kindled against Balaam. He had not waited for the men to come to him as was told him. He seemed so eager to comply with the request of the king of Moab that he jumped over the proviso in the case and went on his own authority.” (Bible Commentary, E. M. Zerr, Vol. I, pg. 247-248)
2. As Balaam was traveling, the Lord sent an Angel to stand in the way of the donkey. On three separate occasions, the Angel blocked the donkey’s path and Balaam struck the donkey. (vs 22-27)
  3. The Lord opened the donkey’s mouth and the donkey questioned Balaam as to why he had struck him those three times. Balaam’s eyes were then opened and he saw that Angel of the Lord. (vs 28-31)
  4. The Angel of the Lord spoke with Balaam and told Balaam to speak only those things revealed to him by the Lord. (vs 32-25)
- F. Three times Balaam consulted with the Lord regarding what to say and three times the Lord told Balaam to bless the people. (23:1-24:9)
  - G. Balak’s anger was aroused against Balaam. Balaam prophesied against Balak, telling of Moab’s eventual downfall. Balaam also prophesied against Amalek and the Kenites. (24:10-19)
  - H. After blessing the Israelites and cursing all others, Balaam departed. (24:25)

#### **IV. ISRAEL WAS SEDUCED BY THE MOABITES. (25:1-18)**

- A. While Israel remained in Acacia Grove, the Moabites began to influence them towards idolatry. Some of Israel ate with the Moabites and bowed down before their gods. Israel was joined to Baal. As a result, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. The Lord ordered Moses to kill all the offenders. (25:1-5)
- B. One of the children of Israel took a Midianite woman and presented her to his brethren. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar took a javelin and killed the man of Israel and the woman of Midian. The plague was stopped. A total of 24,000 Israelites died in the plague. (25:6-9)
- C. The Lord established a covenant of peace with Phinehas and his descendants. (25:10-13)
- D. The Lord told Moses to attack the Midianites. (25:14-18)

## V. LESSONS LEARNED FROM NUMBERS 17:1-25:18.

- A. The first lesson helps us to understand why preachers are supported by the local church. According to Numbers 18:8-25, the priests were to be supported from the offerings made by the Israelites. Paul uses this as an example in the supporting of the local preacher. (I Corinthians 9:13-14)
- B. The second lesson comes from the example of Moses losing his temper as seen in Numbers 20.
1. Apparently Moses allowed his anger to get the better of him. Moses not only disobeyed the Lord, but he also took part of the credit. Moses said, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10, NKJV)
  2. There was a previous occasion when the Lord told Moses to strike the rock. (Exodus 17:6 - "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." (NKJV))
  3. We should learn from this display of anger. We should apply in our lives the words of Paul when he said, "'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, <sup>27</sup>nor give place to the devil." (Ephesians 4:26-27, NKJV)
- C. The third lesson is an on going lesson from the complaining of the Israelites. We should learn not to complain and grumble against the Lord. Some examples:
1. "Why did the Lord let this happen to me?"
  2. "I'm sure the Lord has given up on me."
  3. "If the Lord was a loving Lord, then this tragedy would not have happened."
  4. When we grumble against the commands of the Lord, we grumble against the Lord.
  5. We should serve the Lord to the best of our abilities. (Philippians 3:12-16) Then let us be content with what the Lord has given us. (Philippians 4:11-13) Note: When Paul uses the term content, he is not saying to be complacent or lethargic. He is simply saying that we are to use what we have and if that is all that we have then let it serve the task. If we obtain more, then use it. If we lose something, then make the best of what we have left.
- D. The fourth lesson comes from Balaam. (Numbers 22-24) We are to speak only what the Lord tells us to speak.
1. The NKJV says that Balaam took up his oracle. The KJV renders the word parable. The oracle or parable came from the Lord.

2. We are to speak only as oracles of God. (I Peter 4:11) The Greek word translated as oracle is *logion* {log'-ee-on} which means 1) a brief utterance, a divine oracle (doubtless because oracles were generally brief) 1a) in the NT, the words or utterances of God 1b) of the contents of the Mosaic law. (Enhanced Strong's Lexicon)
- E. The fifth lesson comes from the Israelites being influenced by the Moabites. (Numbers 25:1-18)
1. We should continue to remember that evil influences can corrupt us just as it corrupted the Israelites.
  2. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (NKJV)
  3. We can also apply the principle of a bad tree bearing bad fruit and a good tree bearing good fruit. If we allow our "tree" to become bad through influence, then we will bear bad "fruit." (Matthew 7:17-20)

## CONCLUSION.

- A. This series of chapters from the history of Israel illustrated for us the dangers of complaining against the Lord and allowing your anger to get the better of you. What was so hard to understand about the complaining of the Israelites is that God has illustrated for them His power time and time again.
- B. At this stage, the children of Israel are nearing the end of their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. In the next lesson, we will see a second generation, second numbering, second journey, and the second set of instructions.

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