



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



NUMBERS 21 - 27

Numbers 21

21:1-3 - "When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, then he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. So Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." The LORD heard the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites; then they utterly destroyed them and their cities. Thus the name of the place was called Hormah."

This chapter marks the beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land. Israel is still technically outside of Canaan on the far side of the Jordan river, but some of the Canaanite peoples that are under the judgment of God live in these lands. This first encounter with the king of Arad at Hormah was significant because of what happened here the last time Israel was in this place. Hormah was the location of Israel's great defeat forty years earlier (Numbers 14:43-45). The Lord had led Israel this far in preparation for entering the Promised Land. Then, the 10 spies returned with an evil report, and the nation chose to follow their conclusions about Canaan and return to Egypt, rather than Joshua and Caleb's insistence that they should go forward. After the Lord's judgment the people attempted the next day to enter the land, but now against the Lord's command and without the Lord's blessing. The inhabitants of this same region utterly defeated Israel.

Now, the Lord has led Israel back to the place of their great fear and worst defeat. The Lord's purpose in bringing them to this same place was to give the nation the opportunity to respond as they should and finish in the right way what was started a generation before. This is the grace of God toward the entire nation, and highlights for us a pattern of how the Lord deals with us in our own spiritual progression. There are certain battles that must be fought and won in the Christian life before we can move forward in the progression of where the Lord is taking us. If we fight and lose, through disobedience, fear, unbelief, etc., we can be confident that the Lord will eventually lead us back to the site of our previous defeat. The keys to the battle are simple; trust and obey. These are lessons we cannot skip as we grow in the Lord.

21:4-9 - "Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."

The victory over the king of Arad at Hormah was a step in the right direction, but was not a signal that Israel had changed in every way for the better. Some old bad habits die hard. Following their victory, they continued toward Canaan by a longer route which allowed them to avoid passing through the land of Edom. The circumstances of the longer route exposed an old shared flaw among the people. As they grew once again impatient on the journey, their fleshly perspective and attitude came spilling out in a renewed complaint against both God and Moses. The complaint is nothing new. It was another empty accusation that they were brought into the wilderness to die. Of course, they also had to add some grumbling about their diet. This time they don't even bother to cloak their complaint with subtlety. They offer up a blatantly contradictory complaint. First they whine that they have no food or water, then in the same breath they complain about the quality of the food the Lord was providing for them. Which was it; that there was no food, or that they did not like the food?

The real issue of course was not that there was no food or water. They had enough of both as the Lord continued to provide daily manna for them and water from the rock as needed. Yet, these miraculous gifts from the Lord may as well have been gravel and sand as far as the attitudes of the people were concerned. They described their own reaction to the Lord's provision after forty years on the manna diet. They loathed (hated) it. They called the manna, "this miserable food." The manna was God's gift to them. The Lord has patience far beyond the measure of our own, but even the Lord was not pleased when they chose to call His gift to them a miserable gift.

Like the last time they complained, the Lord did not speak to the people about their complaint. After forty years of listening to them complain, He was fed up with it and would deal with it without warning or any verbal effort to influence their attitude. The Lord did not even bother to speak to Moses about what He was about to do. This was different from earlier warnings of judgment. Whenever the Lord warns in advance of a coming judgment it is because He is granting the

targets of His judgment the opportunity to repent, change, and avert the necessity of judgment. Here, without warning, the judgment of the Lord is upon them. The judgment is not arbitrary. The Lord sent fiery serpents into the camp to bite the people. The judgment corresponded to their sin. Their complaints against Him were like the poison of a snake's bite to their hearts and minds. This was not just an object lesson though. These snakes were real and the bites they inflicted were real and deadly. The impression was that there were a great number of snakes because the people were not able to protect themselves by killing the snakes or fleeing from them.

As people began to die, those still alive suddenly had a spiritual awakening of perspective and a much needed attitude adjustment. They sought out Moses, whom they had just been grumbling about to repent and appealed to him to intercede with the Lord for them. It is a sad, but all too common pattern among the people of God that discipline of hard and threatening life circumstances will bring about the heart changes that were resisted under more pleasant circumstances. The Lord wants us to reach the place where we will trust Him, submit to Him and obey Him whenever He directs us. If we don't, we should expect that like with Israel here, He will design a set of more difficult circumstances until we get the message and yield to Him. Either way the Lord will win the power struggle between ourselves and Him, and the sooner we learn that lesson, the better off we will be.

Moses was faithful once again to turn to the Lord on behalf of the people. The Lord spoke to him a very specific direction to alleviate the issue of the serpents for the people. Moses was to make a representation of one of the serpents in bronze and mount it on one of the poles used to raise the tribal standards. He was to lift the bronze serpent in the midst of the people and everyone that looked upon it would survive the real serpent's bite. All who did not look and were bitten would die from the serpent's bite. Remember that the serpent represented their own sin, and the bite of the serpent was simply the consequential judgment of God for their sin. The Lord mercifully provided salvation from the death that their own sin had caused, but there was one and only one way to be saved.

Jesus referred to this same incident, in His conversation about salvation with Nicodemus, and applied it to His own mission. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:14-16). Jesus compared the lifting of the bronze serpent to Himself being lifted up. He was drawing a symbolic comparison to His death in which He was to be lifted up on the cross. There are several salvation parallels. Jesus was lifted up on the cross like the bronze serpent. He bore the sins of the people like the serpent represented the sins of the people. The deadly bite of the snakes is the spiritual equivalent of the judgment that every person in this world is under for their own sin. The way of salvation for Israel was to look at the

serpent, while the way of salvation for us is simply to look in faith at Christ crucified for us. All who failed to look at the serpent died from the poisonous bite, and all who do not look to Christ's saving death on the cross will be a fatality of their own sin. In both cases, God's only provision for salvation is in what He caused to be lifted up.

21:34-35 - "But the LORD said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon." So they killed him and his sons and all his people, until there was no remnant left him; and they possessed his land."

From there, the Lord led them into two more successful battles with the kings of the Amorites and Bashan. The first battle fulfilled a prophecy the Lord spoke to Abraham over 400 years earlier. "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:16). The spiritual principle involved here is important for us to learn as we follow Israel in their conquest of Canaan. It is an issue that has caused some confusion and questions for Bible readers throughout the generations. Israel fought and won battles here with both Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan. When they won the battles, they did not capture the people of these nations and incorporate them into their own society. They killed, not just the leaders, or the soldiers, but the kings, the sons of the kings, and all their people until there was no remnant left of these nations.

For our modern sensibilities this is quite a jolt. Can you imagine if this happened in today's world? CNN would be doing 'expose' specials for months. Hollywood would be up in arms and making anti-Israelite moves for years to come. There would be questions raised concerning the right of Israel to displace nations that "were there before them", and the outrage over killing all the people would be tremendous. The question we must face and resolve is whether Israel sinned, or did the wrong thing in this. We know Israel sinned many many times in the wilderness, but this was not one of them. In this, Israel obeyed the Lord and carried out His will. It was the Lord Who ordained the destruction of the nations of Bashan and the Amorites. Why would the Lord do such a thing? The direct answer is sin. The Lord had allowed these two nations a specific measure of iniquity, and they had reached their limit. It was time for these nations to be judged with a death penalty from Him. This is no different than the way the Lord judged the entire world in the Flood, and later the sin filled cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The foundational principle that still applies to every nation today, with the same force that it applied in that day is that the Lord is the Lord over all the nations of this world. Paul said it this way in Acts.

"and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God..." (Acts 17:26-27). The implication is that the Lord determines the geographic boundaries of every nation, and He also determines the amount of time in history that each nation will last. He deals with each nation according to His own standards of righteousness. No nation has the right to exist or continue beyond what the Lord determines. Any nation that disregards and disobeys the Lord will eventually face a similar end, and history is littered with the nations that did so and no longer exist.

Numbers 22

22:5-9 - "So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may 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." So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me." And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

The story of Balaam and Balak takes center stage for the next three chapters. It is unusual in a number of ways, but the most obvious is that in the account of the wilderness journey of Israel so far all of the attention has been directly on Israel and Moses as the one chosen by God to reveal His will regarding Israel. Israel is still the primary concern, but neither Balaam or Balak are Israelites. Balak is the king of Moab, and Balaam is a seer who will be used by Yahweh to reveal His will for Israel, but is himself outside of the covenant. Balaam is somewhat a mysterious figure because he is not presented in the story as either fully good or fully bad, but as a mixture of spiritual elements. Even though Balaam himself is a difficult to understand mixture of spiritual motivations, the message the Lord speaks to us through his actions and words is clear and significant.

The first thing we should recognize about Balaam is that he had gained a reputation as a seer who was available for hire. Balak's fears toward Israel arriving in proximity to Moab lead him to look for a solution to the problem. He sends messengers to Balaam with a fee to hire Balaam to pronounce a curse upon Israel. The practice of cursing was common in ancient cultures and here, it involved seeking a seer perceived to have great spiritual power or influence to

formally declare that bad things would happen to the target of the curse. Balaam does not react with any surprise or outrage at being offered money to do such a thing, indicating that this was probably not the first time he had been hired to pronounce a curse. Balaam instructs the messengers of Balak to stay the night while he seeks the Lord regarding Balak's offer. This tells us that Balaam understood that he had no power to effectively curse Israel without the Lord's involvement.

That night, God came to Balaam and initiated a conversation with him in an unusual manner. God asked Balaam, "Who are these men with you?" What should have caught Balaam's attention, but didn't, is that God was asking him a question as if seeking unknown information. God knew who the men were. He knew they were messengers of Balak. He knew that they were there carrying a fee to influence Balaam to curse the people that God identified as His own holy nation. So, why did God ask this question and why did Balaam miss it? God asked the question to catch Balaam's attention and to cause him to reconsider his motives in even asking God about this. It was as though the Lord was saying in His question; I know who Israel is, but who are these people that want you to curse Israel. The Lord's question exposed His low esteem for the messengers of Balak. Balaam missed the implications in the question and proved that even though he was a seer who talked with God, he really was somewhat spiritually dense.

22:12-14 - "God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you." The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

Balaam missed God's hint that He did not have regard for the messengers of Balak, so He spelled out his will for Balaam in crystal clear terms. He commanded Balaam to not go with them or curse Israel because they were blessed. Without saying it directly, the Lord indicated that any attempt to curse Israel would meet with His opposition because it was His blessing upon Israel. Balaam did understand this time what the Lord was saying. He responded with an appropriate adjustment. The previous night, Balaam was hoping to be able to go with the messengers and be able to accept the fee of Balak. Now, the Lord's command has changed that plan and Balaam sends the messengers back to Balak with the message that the Lord had refused to let him go with them. This message of Balaam's contains a hint of the seed of his trouble to come. He neglects to say anything about the impossibility of him cursing Israel and leaves open the door for Balak to misunderstand his refusal as a negotiating ploy seeking a greater fee. Balaam did not say that he would not come under any circumstances to curse Israel, only that the Lord would not let him do so. This hints about his lingering desire to do so.

The true motive of Balaam is uncovered for us by Peter in this passage. "forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;" (II Peter 2:15).

22:15-22 - "Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former. They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, 'Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.'" Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God. Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me." God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do." So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab. But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him.

Balak plays the negotiation game with Balaam by sending more distinguished messengers with a much greater offer. Not only will Balak raise the amount of Balaam's fee if he will come curse Israel for him, Balak offers to "do whatever you say to me." This is what we might call a blank check offer. Balak is so deeply motivated to have Israel cursed that he offers Balaam whatever price he names to do so. This is the highest offer he can make to Balaam. At first, Balaam seems to handle this great temptation to compromise the command of the Lord in the right way. He responds with a firm answer. He declares that even if Balak were to give him a house full of gold and silver he could not do contrary to the Lord's command. As solid as this response from Balaam is, it is his next statement that reveals where his heart is with this irresistible offer of Balak's.

Rather than send the second delegation of messengers back to Balak, Balaam bids them stay the night while he seeks the Lord to see if he can gain permission to accept their offer. This was Balaam's failure point. He had no business asking the messengers to stay. He had no business going back to the Lord to seek His disposition on this issue. The Lord's will was clear. The Lord had made His will known to Balaam in no uncertain terms, and now, as if God had never spoken to him the first time, Balaam was going to ask again. This shows us that Balaam was disregarding what the Lord had already spoken to him, and he did so because he desperately wanted to hear a different answer from God.

What is truly surprising in the story is what happens next. God came and spoke to Balaam a second time. This time, the Lord gives Balaam different instructions that effectively contradict one of the previous commands He had given him.

Before, God told Balaam not to go with the messengers. Now, He tells him to go with them. The Lord does repeat His warning to not curse Israel, but gives Balaam permission to go. Is the Lord being inconsistent here? Why would He say this to Balaam? This second word from God indicates to us that Balaam has already crossed the line into rebellion toward the Lord and the change in the Lord's command is evidence of the beginning of the Lord's judgment in his life, not that the Lord has changed His mind. When Balaam sets out the next morning, God was angry that he was going, and even sent His angel to block his way as an adversary against him. How serious was Balaam's choice to go? We find out later from the angel of the Lord, that had Balaam's donkey not resisted, that the angel would have slain him.

The entire point of this part of the story is that when God speaks, we are to listen and obey, and not presume to seek Him for a different answer. The desire to get a different answer from God only arises from a heart that wants its own way no matter what. God is not like a weak willed parent with uncertain convictions that can be manipulated or convinced to change His boundaries and permissions. I have many times dealt with believers in a counseling circumstance where they clearly understood the will of God for their life issue as they came to understand the Biblical principle that applied in such circumstances, only to see them try to create wiggle room for themselves to find a way around God's boundary. We should understand this about God. He sees right through our transparent desires and attempts to get our own way when our way is at odds with His way. God understands our struggle when His will causes us to have to deny ourselves, and obey Him, and blesses those whose core commitment is to submit to His will once they know what it is. He has no regard, however, for those who know His will and who continue to maneuver their way around it.

22:28-33 - "And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground. The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me. But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live."

Some struggle with the idea that a donkey spoke to Balaam. I don't. We are told that the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey. In other words, the donkey speaking had nothing to do with the ability of the donkey. This was a miracle of

God. The donkey speaking should not surprise us, because God is able to do whatever He chooses. What should surprise us is the way Balaam responds. He does not seem at all shocked that the donkey spoke. He enters into conversation with the donkey as though they were old friends and had many previous conversations. The only conclusion I can draw from this is that Balaam's response is another indication of how spiritually dense he had suddenly become because of his pursuit of his own sinful desires. Serious sin does have a heart and mind numbing effect upon people. We don't think as clearly in spiritual rebellion as we do in obedience to the Lord.

There is a message in the donkey speaking to us as well. It clears up any confusion we might have taken from this story. Because Balaam's flaws are obvious, we might wonder why God would ever choose to speak through such a man as this. In chapter 24, we are going to listen as God speaks a profound and far reaching prophetic word through Balaam. God speaking through the donkey is meant to teach us that God can, and sometimes does choose to speak through imperfect vessels. If God can speak through a donkey, he can speak through Balaam too. We should not assume that a person speaking true words from God means that the messenger is as pure as the message spoken.

Numbers 23

23:7-12 - "He took up his discourse and said, "From Aram Balak has brought me, Moab's king from the mountains of the East, 'Come curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel!' How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced? As I see him from the top of the rocks, And I look at him from the hills; Behold, a people who dwells apart, And will not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright, And let my end be like his!" Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have actually blessed them!" He replied, "Must I not be careful to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?"

The Lord has now allowed Balaam to participate in Balak's plan to denounce Israel, but the Lord turns the tables on Balak by placing a much different word in the mouth of Balaam than the one for which Balak hoped and paid. The declarations, "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?", are more than Balaam saying that it would be wrong for him to curse Israel while the Lord wants to bless them. It is really a statement of his inability to do so. Balaam is declaring to Balak that it is the Lord Who is in charge in this circumstance, not Balak and not even Balaam. Balak is operating in a classic pagan religious perspective in which the "gods" exist for humans to persuade, manipulate and convince to do what we

want them to do. The Lord speaks through Balaam here to set the record straight. He cannot be manipulated by Balak or Balaam whether they offer seven sacrifices on seven altars, or seven thousand. The Lord pursues His own agenda and is not at the beck and call of any human's agenda, no matter how rich, powerful or persuasive they may be. Balaam could curse Israel in theory, but his curse would not carry the desired impact because God has chosen to bless them.

Balaam identifies Israel prophetically as a people who dwell apart. This is in reference to the special set apart relationship to which God had called them. Israel is His holy nation. The word holy carries the meaning of being set apart unto God. Israel's basic identity is a nation that dwells apart. That does not mean that they are physically or geographically isolated from the other nations, but that they are different. They dwell apart in the sense that their national standards are the standards established by God's Law. They do not live like any of the other nations of the world around them. The church is called to be a nation that dwells apart in the same sense. We are God's holy nation in the New Covenant (I Peter 2:9). We live in the midst of the nations of the world, but we are to spiritually dwell apart from them. We should not adopt the standards of the culture around us which are constantly changing. Our speech and behavior is to be noticeably different than the world. It is not our similarity to a fallen world that will impress the world, but our distinctions that are meant to draw attention to the God Who has saved us and made us holy.

The statement, "Who can count the dust of Jacob...?", is prophetic reminder from the Lord of a promise He made long before to Abraham that Balaam would not have known. "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered." (Genesis 13:16). The Lord has fulfilled that promise as Balaam surveys from his high vantage point the extensive camp of Israel. Balaam's discourse ends with his own inspired cry that he might be blessed at the end of his life to the degree that Israel had been blessed by the Lord. We will see that Balaam's own greedy compromise will exclude him from such a blessing as he dies.

23:13-20 - "Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from where you may see them, although you will only see the extreme end of them and will not see all of them; and curse them for me from there." So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. And he said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering while I myself meet the LORD over there." Then the LORD met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." He came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the leaders of Moab with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?" Then he took up his discourse and said, "Arise, O Balak, and hear; Give ear to me, O son of Zippor! "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; When He has blessed, then I cannot revoke it."

Balak is none too pleased by Balaam's first discourse. Balak has gone to great trouble and invested considerable time and expense in the hope that Balaam would be able to resolve his fears about Israel. Instead, Balaam's spiritual declaration regarding Israel has compounded the problem by blessing them rather than cursing them. Balak understands the implications of Balaam's blessing upon Israel clearly, but he remains clueless about the even greater implications of the Lord's part in all this. Balak does not realize that it is hopeless to continue to try to persuade God to curse Israel through Balaam. Balak has the "bright" idea to simply change the venue.

He reasons that if Balaam were to build the seven altars and offer seven sacrifices upon a different mountain that he might receive a different response. He takes Balaam to another high spot overlooking the camp of Israel, but one from which Balaam would "only see the extreme end of them and will not see all of them." The idea behind this decision was that Balak was reasoning that Balaam did not curse Israel because he saw too much of Israel's great numbers and that he was overwhelmed by the site and was fearful to curse such a great nation. Balak now hopes that if Balaam only sees the extreme end of the camp of Israel he will not be intimidated and will gain the courage to pronounce the curse he desperately desires. Again, Balak is only seeing this circumstance from a horizontal, fleshly perspective. The issue was not Balaam being intimidated by Israel's numbers, but that he was being intimidated by the Lord.

The Lord puts His word in Balaam's mouth a second time. This time the message is more pointed and is aimed directly at Balak. The Lord addresses Balak in a way that calls for his full attention. The declaration about the Lord that follows is a classic text declaring one of the characteristics of the Lord's nature. "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" Balak was approaching the Lord through Balaam as though He were a man that could

be bribed or manipulated. Balak had dishonored the Lord by assuming that He was motivated in the same ways that Balak himself was. It was time for Balak to learn that God's character was radically different than his own. Lesson number one; God is not a fallen human being with the character flaws that all people share. Lesson number two; God does not lie. Lesson number three: God is consistent and constant in holding to His principles unlike humans who bend the rules to suit themselves. Lesson number four; God keeps His word.

23:21-26 - "He has not observed misfortune in Jacob; Nor has He seen trouble in Israel; The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a king is among them. God brings them out of Egypt, He is for them like the horns of the wild ox. For there is no omen against Jacob, Nor is there any divination against Israel; At the proper time it shall be said to Jacob And to Israel, what God has done! Behold, a people rises like a lioness, And as a lion it lifts itself; It will not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain." Then Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!" But Balaam replied to Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'Whatever the LORD speaks, that I must do'?"

The Lord's prophetic discourse through Balaam continues shifts here from Himself to Israel and His purpose for Israel. Balak's plan to stop Israel is going to go down in flames because Israel has one thing going for it that Moab and Balak don't. Yahweh is with Israel. He has led Israel up from Egypt. Yahweh is in the midst of the camp of Israel and as long as He is with them, there is the shout of a king in their camp. That shout is the bold confidence of a nation that knows that their king is greater than all opposition they will face. Yahweh fights for Israel with the power of a wild ox that cannot be stopped. No omen or divination by Balaam or any other magician or sorcerer that Balak may hire next will be of any use against this nation which is blessed by Yahweh. Israel will devour its enemies like a lion devours its prey. In other words; Balak does not stand a chance.

At this point, Balak cries out to Balaam to stop speaking. Twice now, Balak has sought a curse against Israel, and twice now the Lord has caused Balaam to instead pronounce an even greater blessing upon His chosen people. There is a lesson here that we should take to heart and from which we should be encouraged. The church is the chosen people of God in the New Covenant. God has called us to go where we are not wanted. As we go in obedience to the Lord there will inevitably be opposition stirred up around us. Those who oppose the purpose of God will seek to curse us and hinder us, but no matter how great the opposition of the world, the Lord's blessing upon us is greater still. "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4).

Numbers 24

24:5-9 - "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, Like gardens beside the river, Like aloes planted by the LORD, Like cedars beside the waters. Water will flow from his buckets, And his seed will be by many waters, And his king shall be higher than Agag, And his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, And will crush their bones in pieces, And shatter them with his arrows. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, And cursed is everyone who curses you."

Balak wants Balaam to try a third time to change the message from the Lord by taking him to a third location and once again offering seven sacrifices on seven altars. The Lord gives Balaam a response for Balak a third time also, but this time the Lord's response comes with even greater emphasis. Balaam is overwhelmed in a trance like state as the Spirit of God comes upon him and causes him to fall to the ground with his spiritual perspective opened to see in a vision what the Lord has planned for Israel in the future. The Lord's descriptions of Israel are not meant to be taken literally here, but is prophetic poetic language describing the degree of the blessing of the Lord that will rest upon His holy nation.

Israel will be like a garden. The very first environment the Lord chose for man was the Garden of Eden. This picture of Israel like a garden is a reminder that, for those who live in right relationship with the Lord, He will cause their lives to flourish like a well watered garden. Israel is compared then to cedar trees growing beside the water. Cedars were considered the best and strongest trees for building. Cedar wood was the best wood for great construction projects due to its strength, durability, and invulnerability to insect damage. Cedar wood was chosen for that reason in building both the Temple and the palace of the king in Israel's later history. Water flowing from his buckets pictures a culture free from the ravages of drought and abundant in their harvests. Israel's seed being by many waters indicates the fruitful growth of the population and the geographic expansion filling all the boundaries of the Promised Land.

The king of Israel being higher than Agag is a double pointed image. First, at this point in Israel's history, there was no king over Israel. The first king was Saul and he actually defeated a king named Agag in battle. This prophecy anticipates that future battle and its predetermined outcome. The Lord was declaring to Balak that his attempts to thwart the establishment of Israel in the land were doomed to fail. The Lord has brought Israel up from Egypt, it is the Lord that fights for Israel with the strength of a wild ox, and it is the Lord that will cause Israel to devour all its adversaries like a lion devours its prey.

The declaration of the primary covenant blessing upon Israel harkens back to God's original promise to Abraham. "Blessed is everyone who blesses you, And cursed is everyone who curses you." The Lord had said this to Abraham when He first called him into covenant relationship with Him. "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). The real story of the conquest of the Promised Land to come will not be a story of Israel's greater numbers, weaponry or strategy, but a story of the greater blessing of God upon the nation. Each nation that chooses to bless Israel will be blessed. Each nation that curses them will themselves be cursed. The implications were personal for Balak. He has just hired Balaam to try to curse Israel three times. What should he anticipate for himself and his nation is response from the Lord? Balak and Moab will be cursed for having tried to curse Israel.

24:17-19 - "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be a possession, Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession, While Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion, And will destroy the remnant from the city."

This is Balaam's second visionary prophecy from the heights of Peor. After the first prophecy, Balak responded in great anger by clapping his hands, not in applause, but in rage that Balaam had done the opposite of what he had paid him to do and pronounced a greater blessing upon Israel rather than curse. Balaam then is given another prophetic word by the Lord which identifies the contrasting futures of the kingdoms of Israel and Moab. Balak's future prospects are not favorable. The nation of Moab has only judgment coming in their future. Balaam describes a coming king of Israel who will rise like a bright star in the night sky. That king will wield his scepter (a rod symbolizing the authority of the kingdom) like a weapon of war. The king of Israel will crush through the forehead of Moab with his scepter. This somewhat gruesome picture is meant to drive home in vivid imagery the complete dominion of Israel over Moab in the future. Moab will not be the only nation in the region over which Israel will extend its dominion. Edom and Seir will similarly become the possession of Israel.

This prophecy is what we can call a layered prophecy. It addresses both a distant and far distant future development. The distant development finds its fulfillment in the future King David. When David consolidates the kingdom he will finally defeat all the surrounding nations that remain enemies of Israel. The Lord will establish David's dominion and give him and Israel under him peace on every side. The second, deeper layer of this prophecy stretches far beyond David into the future for fulfillment. One of the titles given to the messiah of Israel was the Son of David. This described the common belief that the messiah would come and once again establish the kingdom as David had done, making Israel the ascendant nation in the world.

Jesus was identified as the true Son of David. He is the Messiah, or God's chosen and anointed One. When Jesus came, he did not return national Israel to prominence by defeating the Romans in battle as many expected. Jesus fulfilled God's plan of salvation and established His kingdom, but it was a spiritual kingdom rather than a natural kingdom. Here is the testimony of Jesus about His kingdom when He was being examined by Pilate. "Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 18:36-37). When Jesus ascended back to heaven, He was named by God the Father the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He was given dominion over all the earth including authority over every nation on earth and every person on earth. He is the true star that came forth from Jacob and He is the One Who holds the scepter of authority with which He exercises His dominion. "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18).

Numbers 25

PARENTAL ALERT—some of the following subject matter involves mature themes. Please review with discernment before sharing with your children.

25:1-3 - "While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.

Israel arrives and camps in Shittim, fresh from their recent victories over the kings, Og and Sihon. It was as they were camped in this region that the attempts of Balak to have Balaam curse Israel took place from three different high ground spots where they could view the camp of Israel. At the end of the third attempt, Balak finally realized that he could not convince Balaam to pronounce a curse against his enemy Israel. Even though neither Balak nor Balaam is named in this section, we should not conclude that they no longer play a part in the story. What happens next for Israel is as bad for them as if they were truly cursed. While at Shittim, the daughters of Moab enter the story. We are meant to understand that these daughters of Moab were the young women of the Moabite nation under Balak's leadership. These young Moabite women approach the men of Israel and invite them to join them for their religious feast.

The Moabites were devoted to a few gods, one of which was the fertility god, Baal. At this feast, sacrifices were offered up to Baal, everyone participating ate a meal dedicated to Baal, and bowed down to the statue of Baal in his honor. Something that is not detailed here, but verified by archeological evidence, is that Baal worship included what was known as cultic prostitution. An essential part of the story of Baal was the sexual relations that he had with his goddess wife, which produced the fertility that the worshippers of Baal desired for their own lives. It was the common practice for the worshippers to role play the actions of Baal and his wife during the height of the ceremony. Young women who were dedicated to Baal's service offered themselves to the men who came to worship Baal in exchange for the sacrifices they brought to Baal. The men of Israel were invited to participate in this. Many of the men of Israel willingly went to the feast, bowed to Baal, and joined with the female servants of Baal in sexual "worship" of Baal.

This was not an accidental development by the Moabites. It was not that they at first attempted to curse Israel, and then later decided to make friends with Israel. This was a purposeful and strategic effort to undermine Israel's strength by luring the men of Israel into the worship of their god, using an appeal to Israel's natural lust. Moab did not just stumble on this plan. An explanation of what happened behind the scenes is given to us later in Numbers. "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD." (Numbers 31:16). The young Moabite women dedicated to Baal were sent to the camp of Israel through the counsel of Balaam. Apparently what happened was that Balak had refused to pay Balaam the large fee he had promised him for cursing Israel because Balaam had refused to curse them. Balaam still wanted the fee, and he conceived a way to get paid without cursing Israel. He counseled Moab to send their dedicated young women to lure the men of Israel into a compromising worship of Baal.

Balaam probably anticipated that the Lord would respond with judgment to Israel's sin, and he was right about that. Moab's attack on Israel succeeded when the kings of the Amorites and Bashan had failed. Those attempts failed because they tried to defeat Israel in a direct military attack while they were under the protection of the Lord. Moab's attack succeeded because they undermined the relationship between Israel and the Lord in which the Lord responded with judgment. We can learn an important lesson about the nature of spiritual warfare and Satan's schemes from this circumstance. As long as we remain in right relationship with the Lord and walk in obedience to Him, there is nothing the enemy can do to directly harm us. He knows this and his schemes often are aimed at more subtle attempts, not to directly attack us, but to undermine our own holiness by appealing to our own natural desires in tempting us to sin against the Lord. Satan does not need to assault us if he can lure us into spiritual, moral, or ethical compromise.

25:8-13 - "When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. Those who died by the plague were 24,000. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'"

When Israel sinned with Baal, the Lord responded with a strong pronouncement of judgment. The Lord ordered the public execution of the leaders of the people. The text does not specify which, or how many leaders were to be executed, but most likely it was all of the leaders that had gone to participate in the idolatrous worship of Baal. Moses was to take these leaders and slay them "in broad daylight", which emphasizes they were to be executed in an open and public way. The purpose would be to give Israel a vivid reminder of the cost of idolatry and adultery as required under the Law of God. At this point, the leaders alone were to be executed. The costly lesson to be learned from those leaders was that even greater than the sin of idolatry and adultery is the sin of a person that leads others to commit those sins by their influence. Those men had been appointed to the responsibility of leadership in God's holy nation in order for them to lead and influence Israel into greater faithfulness to the Lord and His Law. Instead, they led Israel into greater sinful violation of the Law. Now they would pay the ultimate price for abusing their leadership.

Before the capital punishment could be carried out, a new development in the camp greatly increased both the sin and the consequence. As bad as the sin of participating in the worship of Baal had been, the one factor that minimized the judgment upon the rest was that it all took place far from the camp of Israel. The men of Israel left the camp to go to the feast of Baal. The Lord had warned Israel many times to not defile the camp of the Lord and the tabernacle of God by bringing defilement into the camp. Now, before the judgment upon the leaders was executed, another leader from the tribe of Simeon brought one of the young women into the camp and to his family tent. The inference is that while this deadly serious business was being conducted elsewhere in the camp between the Lord, Moses and the offending leaders, this man took this woman of Midian into his tent to have sexual relations with her. It was clear by his actions that this leader of Israel had no shame and no respect for the Lord.

It was at this time that a plague of judgment from the Lord broke out among the people of Israel in response to the severe defilement of the camp. Before it was stopped, 24,000 Israelites died from the plague. Phinehas, a grandson of Aaron

and one of the priests of the Lord, saw them enter the tent and taking a spear he entered the tent and slew both the man and the woman by piercing them through. The actions of Phinehas were not considered murder, but were rather immediately commended by the Lord. When Phinehas killed them, the Lord immediately stopped the plague and called attention to the actions of Phinehas. The Lord identified that he had turned aside the wrath of God from the people. Ordinarily, the only way to stop a judgment like this would be by the offering of an atoning sacrifice. The implication was that the Lord accepted the death of the man as he was slain by the priest of the Lord in place of the animal sacrifice.

What the Lord wanted Israel to understand about the actions of Phinehas in particular was that he had represented the Lord in this. The Lord had betrothed Israel to Himself as a husband betroths a bride. The covenant commitment that Israel was to keep was to remain faithful to the Lord alone, and to never commit adultery with any other god. When Israel had sinned with Baal, and then this one leader had compounded that sin by bringing into the camp of the Lord, the Lord responded with godly jealousy. Phinehas acted on behalf of the Lord as a righteously jealous husband. In doing so, Phinehas acted in the image and likeness of God. This was the Lord's intent for all of Israel all along and He sets Phinehas forward here as an example for Israel to remember for all the generations to follow. The Lord extended the impact of the object lesson by rewarding Phinehas and his sons with a covenant of peace between the Lord and his household and a perpetual priesthood in which the high priest would be chosen from the house of Phinehas on into future generations.

Numbers 26

26:9-10 - "The sons of Eliab: Nemuel and Dathan and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram who were called by the congregation, who contended against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured 250 men, so that they became a warning."

Dathan and Abiram are already dead by the time of the events of this chapter. Their names are mentioned as important reminders of the lesson the Lord taught to all of Israel through them. It was not what we would call a positive lesson, but a lesson of the severe judgment of the Lord in response to their rebellion against Moses and the Lord. The Lord inspires Moses to mention their names again here so that no one will forget what their deaths meant and how the Lord dealt with them. It is a common failing of human nature that events that are in the past tend to be easily forgotten, especially unpleasant events that we would prefer not to remember. As difficult as the remembrance of the execution of Dathan and

Abiram was for the people, the Lord did not hesitate to remind the nation of this uncomfortable event.

The passage mentions that the circumstances of the deaths of Dathan, Abiram, Korah and the other 250 leaders was such that "they became a warning." The Hebrew word translated as "warning" is the same word used for the standards raised by the tribes to mark each tribe's identity as they marched from place to place in the wilderness. Each standard consisted of a long pole and a flag with a symbol representing each tribe. This passage literally describes that the deaths of the rebels as God opened the earth and caused them to be swallowed alive into the earth were flags. How were their deaths flags? The passage does not mean that a literal flag was made for this event, but that God's miraculous execution of these rebels served as a permanent warning reminder for all future generations that the Lord will not tolerate such rebellion among His people.

26:14 - "These are the families of the Simeonites, 22,200."

The focus of this chapter is the second national census of Israel in the wilderness years. It is from the numbering of the people in the census of this chapter and the census from chapter one that the name of the book of Numbers was given. The census in chapter one was taken forty years earlier as Israel first entered the wilderness. This census is taken now at the end of the forty year wilderness journey as a prelude to their entry into the Promised Land. The men of each tribe who are twenty years old and above and able to go to war are counted in order to establish the count for planning the conquest of Canaan and then the settlement of the land to follow.

Overall, even though the forty years in the wilderness was a difficult journey and an extended time of testing for the nation, their numbers remained surprisingly constant. Israel began the forty years with about 603,500 men above the age of 20 total. Now, forty years later the number was at 601,700. The total men of the nation had diminished by only 2000 through the forty years. Some of the tribes increased in numbers in the wilderness as the Lord blessed them. A few tribes lost numbers due to their role in specific rebellions and sins. The tribe with the greatest loss by far was Simeon. Here at the end of the journey Simeon's count was 22,200. A comparison with their count from forty years prior shows how much they had lost. "their numbered men of the tribe of Simeon were 59,300."

(Numbers 1:23). Simeon lost over 37,000 men during these years. The event in the last chapter, in which one of the leaders of the tribe of Simeon defiled the camp of Israel with one of the daughters of Midian and 24,000 lost their lives as a result explains how the tribe of Simeon suffered such a severe loss during these years.

The principle we can learn from this is that the Lord deals with His people on different levels. On one level He deals with the entire nation as if it were one

person in covenant with Him. The entire nation of Israel enjoyed the blessings of the Lord together and suffered under the discipline of the Lord together. At the same time, the Lord clearly, as this passage demonstrates, dealt individually with each of the twelve tribes. Some tribes were more blessed throughout these testing years, and some were judged more than the others depending on what each tribe deserved. Then, on a third level, the Lord dealt with individual families within the nation and tribes such as His dealings with the family of Aaron, Caleb, or Dathan as they deserved. Finally, the Lord also dealt with individuals and caused them to be blessed as they trusted the Lord and obeyed Him (Joshua and Caleb) or judged them as they rebelled and disobeyed.

26:52-56 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Among these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To the larger group you shall increase their inheritance, and to the smaller group you shall diminish their inheritance; each shall be given their inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot. They shall receive their inheritance according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the selection by lot, their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller groups."

Anticipating the time in the near future when Israel would finally cross the river Jordan and conquer the Promised Land, the Lord identifies here how they were to divide the land for settlement. Israel will not be free to settle anywhere they chose or prefer. The Lord is not going to have Joshua ask each tribe where they want to settle. Instead, the portion of territory in Canaan that each tribe will be given will be appointed for them by the Lord. There are two overlapping principles that will guide the settlement of the land. The Lord establishes the rules for the settlement and each tribe will be held accountable to submit to this plan.

The first principle is that each tribe will be assigned a specific geographic territory by the casting of lots. We do not know the details of how the lots were cast for this division of the land, but most likely there were twelve symbols chosen with the name of one tribe written on one side of each which were then cast upon the ground. All the symbols that landed with the name down would be eliminated until one name remained for each territory. This method of determining the home and future of all the tribes of Israel and their families may at first glance seem primitive and arbitrary. The Bible presents it instead as simple and profound. The simplicity of the selection method would eliminate all controversy, debate, and possible political manipulation of the territory allocations. By casting lots, the role of the Lord was given center stage. The casting of lots was not subject to chance, but was an expression of God's sovereignty over even the physics of which lot ended face up and which lots ended up face down as they were cast. "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." (Proverbs 16:33). Acceptance of the cast lot as he determining factor in the lives of the

tribes of Israel required faith that God was really in charge of the details of how the lots landed.

The second principle involved was the Lord's determination of the size of each assigned tribal territory depending upon the size of the tribe at the settlement. The area of the settlement was determined by lots, but the size of the assigned territories was established by the relative numbers of the tribes. A tribe of 76,000 men would receive a portion of land in Canaan more than three times larger than a tribe of 22,000 men. This allotment of the size of the land was a just and equitable distribution and reflected the Lord's intention that every family in Israel have their own parcel of land as an economic foundation upon which to a family inheritance.

26:63-65 - "These are those who were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest, who numbered the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." And not a man was left of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun."

The Lord directs the attention of Israel forward to where He is still taking them. The wilderness years are finally drawing to a close. The first generation of men over the age 20 to enter the wilderness forty years earlier have all died by this point with the exceptions of Caleb, Joshua and Moses. The Lord had declared His judgment against the men of that generation and so it has come to pass exactly as He said. The point is direct and important to emphasize. The Lord may delay His judgment because of His great patience, but He is faithful to eventually fulfill His word. He is as faithful to His promises of judgment as He is to His promises of blessing. He is true to His word, and will never let something previously declared slip away through forgetfulness or disinterest. This is what the Lord had spoken, forty years before and this is what the new generation of Israel lived to see fulfilled. "The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.'" (Numbers 14:26-30).

Numbers 27

27:3-7 - "Our father died in the wilderness, yet he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but he died in his own sin, and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be withdrawn from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers." So Moses brought their case before the LORD. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right in their statements. You shall surely give them a hereditary possession among their father's brothers, and you shall transfer the inheritance of their father to them."

This account fills in the details from its mention in chapter 26. Zelophehad died without any sons. His five daughters approached Moses and made a respectful and wise appeal regarding the inheritance rights. They distinguished their father from the rebellion of Korah. Apparently all inheritance rights were lost in the families that perished in that rebellion. The daughters do not paint their father as exemplary, but offer a realistic portrait of his spiritual condition. He (and they) refused to join the rebellion of Korah, but he did die in the wilderness for his own sin of following the unbelieving example of the ten spies who returned with a bad report of the Promised Land. Their appeal is wise, because while that sin was significant, the entire nation with the exception of Joshua and Caleb had participated in that sin and retained their family inheritance rights.

They asked Moses to grant them full inheritance rights in the absence of any brothers for the purpose of continuing their father's name. Moses sought the Lord and received the Lord's command to honor their appeal. This event is recorded for our benefit and we can learn a couple of important principles from it. The first principle is that inheritance rights in God's holy nation were not divided equally among all children in the family. We saw this expressed earlier in the double portion of the inheritance usually given to the first born son. In our society today, because there is no framework in our law for recognizing God's standards, the law of inheritance is purely based upon perceived human equality without any spiritual purpose driving the decisions of inheritance. Therefore, an inheritance today is divided equally among all the children in the absence of any will. In Israel, there was a purpose why the daughters of the family were normally excluded from the inheritance. As strange as it may at first seem to our culturally conditioned ears, the Lord established this pattern for a good and wise purpose.

In Israel, the sons of the family were given the inheritance, and the firstborn was given the double portion because they were to become the heads of their respective families. In spite of modern hesitation to acknowledge men as the head of the household, the Bible is unashamed to identify this as God's design and intended pattern. Any daughter born into the family that remained unmarried did not need an inheritance because she remained a family member and the

male head of the family was responsible to provide for her all of her life. Any daughter that grew up and married, as most did, was given a valuable dowry to take with her into her marriage. She was not given an inheritance because her marriage transferred her family membership into her husband's family. This all practically foreshadowed the deeper spiritual picture of us being identified as the Bride of Christ and being transferred from the family of Adam to the family of Jesus in our salvation and sharing in our heavenly husband's eternal inheritance.

The exception in this case was that there were no sons to become the new head of the family at the death of their father. Without this exception provision, this family would have lost its identity as the inheritance was transferred to the nearest male relative who had his own family. The Lord intended the identity of each family in Israel to be preserved and this case provided the opportunity to emphasize that. The remaining question is why the Lord did not originally include this law in the laws of the covenant given to Moses on Sinai. The Lord certainly knew in advance that this circumstance would develop. The appeal of the five daughters did not remind God to cover an issue He had forgotten or overlooked. The answer is that the Lord intended His Law to contain both core statutes which were declared on Sinai, and case laws which were added in the remaining years of the wilderness journey before Moses died. The Lord could have given the case laws as hypothetical cases, but He chose to wait until an actual case occurred corresponding to that law in order to make the point of the law more effective in the sight of Israel.

27:12-17 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go up to this mountain of Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the sons of Israel. When you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was; for in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

This exchange between the Lord and Moses is easily one of the most poignant of all their recorded conversations. The Lord directs Moses to walk to the top of a nearby mountain. From there, Moses will be allowed to see the Promised Land. However, once he has seen it, he will die. The impending death of Moses is the fulfillment of the previously announced judgment of the Lord upon him. In the incident where the Lord commanded Moses to speak to the rock which represented Christ so that water would come forth for the people, Moses had instead struck the rock twice. In doing so, Moses had done more than make an innocent mistake. He has violated a type of the cross of Christ in such a way as to portray that Christ would have to die twice in order for the people of God to

receive the blessing of salvation. The Lord judged Moses for this violation by prohibiting him from entering the Promised Land and ordaining that he would die in the wilderness. The time has come for the fulfillment of that judgment. Moses does not actually die in this chapter, but this announcement identifies that he has reached his own personal final days.

Along with the judgment of the Lord, Moses also receives great mercy here. First, it is a mercy from God to know in advance the timing of your own death. Moses was given advance notice and would not be surprised by what was to come. The announcement also allowed Moses to make any necessary arrangements for after he was gone. That the Lord also allowed Moses to see the Promised Land from the mountain was a personal reward for his forty years of otherwise faithful service. Moses would be assured by this glimpse of the Promised Land that God's purpose for Israel to enter and possess the land would be fulfilled and that his efforts to lead Israel out of Egypt would not be ultimately wasted in the wilderness.

This again emphasizes just how much God is in charge of our lives. Some people live as though their lives are their own and they are in charge of how long they will live, while some people see live as a series of purely random events and the end being as accidental as everything else in their lives. The truth is that neither reflects the role the Lord plays in our lives. He is sovereign over our lives and determines the number of our days and the moment our heart will stop beating. The death of Moses would not be the conclusion of a slow and natural deterioration. Moses would walk up this mountain, see the Promised Land as God intended, and when his final obedience to the Lord was complete, Moses would simply die. Even though the timing and circumstance of his death was a judgment from God, Moses remained in right relationship with the Lord and he could obey this final command with the deep confidence of a man of faith who trusting his soul to His trustworthy God.

The response of Moses to this ordinarily unsettling news of the nearness of his own death reveals just how much Moses had spiritually grown over the forty years wilderness journey. The journey began with a hesitant and resistant Moses protesting the Lord's call at the burning bush. Now, at the end, there is no further protest remaining in the heart of Moses. His only response was not concerned with himself at all. Moses raises an issue, but it was for the sake of Israel and not himself. Moses is concerned about Israel, with all their failings and weaknesses, being left like sheep without a shepherd. Moses appeals to the Lord to provide a leader for the nation that will be able to effectively lead them. The request of Moses does not dishonor the Lord and His continuing commitment to lead Israel, but rather, recognizes the key role that leaders play in the life of the congregation of the Lord. The right man, with the right character, prepared by the Lord in the right way is a critical factor in whether the people of God end up where they belong.

27:18-21 - "So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. "You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey him. Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, both he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation."

The Lord's choice to replace Moses as the leader of Israel was Joshua. He had been well prepared for this calling. Throughout the wilderness years Joshua had served both as the personal assistant of Moses and the captain that led the army of Israel into battle. Joshua had spent the necessary time in spiritual preparation by remaining often at the tent of meeting. He was a man in whom the Spirit of God was present. His strong faith in the incident of the 12 spies was evident. He and Caleb also were the only two Israelites alive that had personally scouted out the Promised Land. His experience in leading the army would be important in the many battles of conquest ahead of them in the Promised Land. All of these factors made Joshua the best choice to replace Moses. Yet, in spite of these factors, Joshua would not be fully equipped to lead God's holy nation until he received a special endowment from the Lord through Moses. The Lord commanded Moses to lay hands upon Joshua and impart some of his authority to him in the sight of the nation.

It is significant that Joshua was not given the full authority of Moses, but only some of it. Two points are established in this. First, that Joshua was given a portion of the Lord's authority to lead. In other words, Joshua represented the Lord in his role as leader. This was not political, but spiritual. He did not receive this authority by election of the people, but by appointment of the Lord. It showed that his ultimate accountability was to the Lord for how he led the people of God.

Second, Joshua was only qualified to lead as he received an impartation of some of the same authority the Lord had given to Moses. Joshua did not receive his authority to lead directly from the Lord, but indirectly through the laying on of the hands of Moses. The reason for this was the special role of Moses which extended beyond the span of his life and affected all the generations of the Old Covenant. Moses was the Law giver. As such, all future leaders of the nation derived their authority from Moses. No valid leader of Israel would ever be appointed to lead apart from Moses, or by implication, apart from the Law of God. Every leader was subject to the Law. Joshua would never be free to lead however he desired. He would always be required to lead the people within the boundaries already established by the Law. In the same way, all leaders in the church of Christ today, lead with a derived authority. Our authority derives from Christ. We have no authority apart from Him. It is His church and we are required to lead His church according to His revealed will, ways, and purpose for the

church as written in His Word. Many "leaders" in the church ignore this principle, but they do so to their own shame and the detriment of the church.