



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 28 - 32

Numbers 28

28:1-2 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be careful to present My offering, My food for My offerings by fire, of a soothing aroma to Me, at their appointed time.'"

There is another occurrence of what theologians refer to as anthropomorphism in these verses. The term means to give something that is not human the characteristics of a human for communication purposes. The theology principle that forms the foundation of anthropomorphism as it occurs in cases like this one, where God is described as having human qualities, is that God is not human. Of course, since this was written, Jesus incarnated as a human being, so now we can properly say that the Son of God is human. However, we are meant to understand before we even read these verses that God is not human in his nature. He is divine rather than human. Humanity derives its nature from divinity in the sense that man was originally created to bear the image and likeness of God in a way that no other created thing could. The fall of man into sin has affected the purity of the expression of God's image in all humans though. Therefore, even though God in some cases compares Himself to humans, or uses human characteristics to describe Himself, we are meant to always remember that He does not share any of the fallen human characteristics that we all possess.

The human comparison God made in these verses is the description of the offerings as food. God refers to these offerings as "My food". So, we are supposed to gain a point of understanding from this phrasing that the Lord intentionally chose, while at the same time avoiding reading fallen human connections into what it means. The fallen aspect of food as all humans experience it, is that because of the fall we need food and must eat it in order to survive. Food is a daily reminder to our hearts that we are weak and needy, and incapable of surviving independent of the food that God provides for us. This is not the comparison God wants us to draw to Him when He calls the sacrifices His food. He does not need the sacrifices. He actually did not even physically eat them when they were offered in the tabernacle. It is not that God was hungry and waiting at the tabernacle for his servants to bring him breakfast and dinner to eat so that He would have strength to continue for the next day. It is important when we interpret the meaning of this passage that we avoid reading any sense of need or dependence into it.

However, God chose to describe these sacrifices as His food for a reason. There is another aspect of food that existed before the fall as God placed man in the Garden of Eden and appointed the fruit of all the trees of the garden for him as his food. This other purpose for food was not to meet a need or to sustain life. God created food to be satisfying. God designed food to have tastes and scents

that were experienced by the person eating the food and which made the food appetizing. It is this purpose of food that fits the comparison of the sacrifices to food for God. This emphasis is made again by the reference to the food producing a soothing aroma as it was offered in the fire on the altar. The whole point was not that God needed the sacrifice to sustain His life, but that He desired the sacrifices for the satisfaction they provided. What gave the sacrifices a satisfying taste and aroma was the spiritual meaning of the sacrifice. The sacrifices portrayed the death of Christ on the cross. God the Father looked at, tasted, and smelled the aroma of Christ's sacrifice (using human terms) and was deeply satisfied by it.

28:3-4 - "You shall say to them, 'This is the offering by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs one year old without defect as a continual burnt offering every day. 'You shall offer the one lamb in the morning and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight;'"

This chapter and the next return to a focus on the sacrifices required by the Lord and the feasts of the Lord. While the various sacrifices have previously been covered in detail, the sacrifices in chapter 28 fulfill a different requirement. The sacrifices ordained in Leviticus established the requirements for the individual Israelite in order for them to maintain a right relationship with the Lord in the covenant. They also covered the sacrifices the Levitical priests were required to offer in order to be consecrated for tabernacle service and to maintain their ceremonial purity so that they could maintain their service uninterrupted by defilement.

Here, in this chapter the focus shifts from individual Israelites and priests to the nation of Israel as a whole. The Lord maintained a relationship with both the individual Israelites and with the nation as a whole under the covenant. In the national relationship the entire nation is treated as a single corporate individual. Just like it is necessary for individual people to take steps to maintain right relationship between themselves and the Lord, it was necessary for the nation as a whole to do so also. One of the essentials of that national relationship with the Lord was for the nation to offer regular sacrifices for itself. The requirement here for national sacrifices was that the priests were to offer before the Lord on behalf of the nation a male lamb every morning of every day. Then every evening another male lamb was offered for the nation. On special days such as the feast days these sacrifices were offered in addition to the sacrifices ordained for those feast days. The result was that there was never a day in the tabernacle in which the altar was empty or unused. Every single day from this point forward for all of the history of Israel there was a lamb offered every morning and every evening.

What are we to draw from this for our own relationship with the Lord? There are two points of application for the believer in the New Covenant even though Christ has already died on the cross and all animal sacrifices lost their value from then on. The first aspect that we should see from this is the prevalence of sin in our

lives. Sacrifices had to be offered every day and even twice a day. The symbolic communication is that every day there is an issue with sin to be dealt with, and that if it is dealt with in the morning, it would not last until the next day because another sacrifice was required in the evening. The more we grow in the Lord, the more our hearts grow in awareness of the many ways we daily fall short of God's standard of perfection in our thoughts, our words and our actions. I need the benefits of the cross of Christ applied to my heart every day of my life and throughout each day.

The second point of application for the believer today is in worship. These sacrifices did address the negative aspect of sin, but they also expressed as the sacrifice was made, a heart of worship in continual restoration to right relationship with the Lord based upon the sacrifice. The Lord was training the hearts of the nation in this requirement that He desired much more from them on a daily basis than just a payment for their sins. He wanted them to stop daily and remember Him, acknowledge Him, appreciate Him, praise Him, and worship Him for His great mercy and grace as represented in the sacrifice. The Lord desires such a response from each of us on a daily basis also.

Numbers 29

29:1 - "Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets."

The holy days ordained for the seventh month of the ceremonial calendar are covered again in this chapter. Three of the seven Feasts of Lord occur in the seventh month. This first feast of the month was what became known as the Feast of Trumpets. These days are also described in Leviticus 23. All three Feasts are identified as a "holy convocation." The term designated these days in the yearly calendar of Israel as special days that were to be set apart for holy purpose. All the people of Israel were commanded to do not laborious work on those days. This was a similar requirement as the requirement to abstain from all work on the weekly sabbath, but the restriction on work was lighter for these days than the sabbath. No laborious work meant that work which was ordinarily done for one's livelihood was not allowed. It would be similar to what we call a day off from work. The sabbath day required a stricter abstinence from work including things like building a fire or cooking.

They were convocations in that it was required all of Israel to gather together for the events of these days. Later, when the Promised Land was conquered and settled, these events would be held in Jerusalem and all the tribes of Israel were to leave their homes and travel to Jerusalem to participate in these events. These three events became a highlight of the year for most Israelites and the

remainder of the year was planned around the importance of attending these feasts. However, even for the people that did not want to leave their homes each year and travel to Jerusalem, there was no allowance for them to remain at home. It was not a holy suggestion from the Lord to attend these feasts. The feasts were commanded and full national participation was required. One of the marks of whether our lives truly belong to the Lord or to ourselves is whether we acknowledge and submit to His right to rule over our personal calendar and schedule. It was to Israel's advantage to participate in these feasts because of the special blessing of the Lord that He connected to them, but they also served as tests of obedience for each family in Israel. Some lived close to Jerusalem and attendance was no great sacrifice, but some lived far from Jerusalem and obedient participation cost something in time and expense.

In our generation we have a similar test to pass on a regular basis. "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some" (Hebrews 10:25). The Lord calls all believers into consistent church participation for His purpose. The numbers of people who claim to be Christian and choose to ignore the Lord's call to participate regularly in church is higher than you might imagine. Over 40% of the population of the USA identifies itself as "born again." I think it is safe to say that far less than 40% of the population attends church with any kind of regularity. In fact, the Barna Group, which does religious polling discovered recently that in the last ten years the numbers of those claiming to be born again have risen while at the same time the numbers of those who attend church regularly have fallen. The issue boils down to our heart's perspective of our relationship with the Lord. Do we see Him as our Savior and Lord? In other words, having saved us, does He now have the right to require that we arrange our personal schedules to fit His plan for our lives?

29:7 - "Then on the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall humble yourselves; you shall not do any work."

The second feast began on the tenth day of the month. This feast included the single most important day of the year for all Israel. It was the feast of Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement. Remember, this was the day that the unblemished male lamb was slain and its blood was taken by the high priest through the curtain separating the Holy Place room in the tabernacle from the Holy of Holies, or the inner room of the tabernacle. No one except the high priest was allowed to even enter the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant was positioned. Even the high priest only entered that room on this one day of each year. Once inside the curtain, the high priest was to sprinkle the blood of the lamb upon the golden lid covering the ark of the covenant. Once sprinkled, that lid was transformed in spiritual terms from a judgment seat to a mercy seat. It was called a seat, because the ark of the covenant symbolized the throne of God in heaven. God's presence in the Shekinah glory cloud would appear above the mercy seat, indicating that God was enthroned in the midst of the camp of Israel, and later in the midst of the holy city of Jerusalem. All of the sacrifices commanded in the

Law of God point in one aspect or another to the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, but this day more fully represented the plan of salvation than any other sacrifice.

29:12-17 - "Then on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work, and you shall observe a feast to the LORD for seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire as a soothing aroma to the LORD: thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old, which are without defect; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. Then on the second day: twelve bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect;"

The third feast of the seventh month was the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths in which all Israel was to construct temporary shelters for themselves and live in them for the week of the feast. This practice was a vivid practical reminder of the deliverance of the Lord when He rescued them from slavery in Egypt and caused them to live in tents for the 40 years of the wilderness journey. An interesting feature of this feast that was not described in our previous study of the feast in Leviticus 23 was the requirement of the bulls to be offered to the Lord on each day of the feast. Bulls were the most expensive of all the sacrifices. For this feast a specific number of bulls were to be offered by the Levitical priests to the Lord on behalf of the nation each day of the feast. On the first day of the feast thirteen bulls were to be offered. On the second day twelve bulls were to be offered. Each of the seven days the number of bulls offered was diminished by one until on the seventh day seven bulls were sacrificed. This countdown of sacrificial bulls ended on that last day with a perfect ceremonial symmetry of seven bulls offered on the seventh day of the feast in the seventh month of the year.

There is one final detail of this unusual count of the sacrifices that is worth noting. If the total of all the bulls offered for the feast is added together, the count is seventy bulls sacrificed in the duration of the feast. The number 70 is not insignificant as a symbol in relationship to this feast. In early Israelite tradition, the total number of the nations of the world identified from Genesis 10-11 is 70. I believe these seventy bulls correspond to the 70 nations of the world around Israel. The Feast of Booths was to remind Israel that the Lord had saved Israel as a nation out of the nations of the world and set them as His holy nation apart from the nations of the world. They were not set apart to escape from the nations, but to be established as God's holy nation in the midst of all the other nations. Israel's great calling was to represent the Lord and His Law to all the nations of the world. This sacrifice of the 70 bulls was meant to remind Israel of the Lord's holy calling.

Numbers 30

30:1-2 - "Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the LORD has commanded. If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

All of chapter 30 is dedicated to the practice of making vows to the Lord and the resulting obligation to keep the vows we have taken. Vowing involved what we could describe as a sacred promise. It was a promise made in the context of covenant relationship with the Lord. The promise is made by a person in the covenant to the Lord of the covenant. The vow might involve a promise to do certain things for the Lord in the future, give a certain amount to the Lord as an offering, or to abstain from certain normally allowable activities as a sacrificial offering to the Lord. It is important to know that the Lord never commanded His people to make vows to Him. He often warned them to seriously consider their decision before making any vow. While the Lord did not command or require His people to make vows, He did require them to fulfill the vows they chose to make unto Him. These laws of vowing were aimed at establishing God's standards of righteousness whenever a vow was made.

The commandment of the Lord in these verses is that when a man makes a vow to the Lord, "he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." This law holds all men who make vows accountable to honor their vow once it is made. There were no "takebacks" when making a vow. It was not allowed to make a vow, and then later reconsider and choose to back out of the obligation imposed by the vow. Once made, all vows must be kept. All reconsideration must be done before uttering the vow in the presence of the Lord. In holding His people accountable in this way, the Lord was training them in spiritual integrity. We have a saying in our culture, "a man's word is his bond." It means that when a man gives his word, his character should always follow through and fulfill his own word previously given. This principle applies in this situation because the Lord was using vows to train the hearts of His people. However, vows rise to a higher level than even the giving of one's word. Giving one's word is what we call a promise. It is not right or honorable to break a promise given, but it does not bear the consequences that breaking a vow bears.

The primary difference between a vow and a promise is that promises are primarily horizontal while vows are primarily vertical. We make promises to one another, but all vows are made with a conscious awareness of God's presence as the One Who will hold the maker of the vow accountable to fulfill his vow. God will also bring consequences upon the head of the one who makes a vow and then later breaks it or fails to fulfill it. This element of the Lord's presence in the vow and His commitment to hold the vow taker accountable creates a special sense of obligation far beyond even the normal obligation of a promise.

These two passages highlight the significance the Lord attaches to vows. "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!" (Ecclesiastes 5:4). "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised." (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). There are two terms in these passages that the Lord attaches to those that make vows and do not keep them. Failure to keep a vow is not simply a mistake, but a sin. The person that does not keep his vow to the Lord is identified as belonging among the category of fools.

It is important to recognize that there remains an application of the obligation of vowing in our culture today. We do not typically vow as often or for as many situations as the people of Bible times did, but there is one circumstance where our culture continues to make a vow unto the Lord. In wedding ceremonies, the culmination point of the ceremony is the vows the groom and bride make to one another. Even though the vow is spoken to one another, the vow in a wedding is truly a vow unto the Lord. That is the reason why wedding ceremonies are performed in churches and by ordained ministers. Civil service marriages intentionally attempt to eliminate the spiritual element from the ceremony by removing it from church and having a government official perform the ceremony rather than an ordained representative of the Lord. The concept behind the vow in a spiritual wedding ceremony is that when the groom and bride vow their faithfulness to each other, they do so in the presence of the Lord and He holds them accountable to their vow for the rest of their lives. This is why breaking a marriage vow is so much more serious than popular culture is comfortable to acknowledge.

30:3-9 - "Also if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by an obligation in her father's house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and her obligation by which she has bound herself, and her father says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father should forbid her on the day he hears of it, none of her vows or her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her because her father had forbidden her. However, if she should marry while under her vows or the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself, and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day he hears it, then her vows shall stand and her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand. But if on the day her husband hears of it, he forbids her, then he shall annul her vow which she is under and the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her. But the vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, everything by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her."

The remainder of the chapter is concerned with the special circumstances created when a woman makes a vow unto the Lord. The first principle that should not be overlooked from this section is the strong affirmation of the spiritual relationship that women had with the Lord even under the Old Covenant. It should not need to be defended, but the role of women in the Bible is often attacked as oppressive by those looking to build a case against the Bible by comparing its teachings with the commonly accepted patterns of modern culture. It is true that the Bible and modern culture clash on many points including the role of women and those who believe the Bible to be God's Word need not be ashamed of those differences. Whenever a difference between the Bible and current cultural practices or preferences is identified, we can be confident that it is not the Bible which suffers from the comparison. However, it is simply a cheap shot to characterize the Bible as anti-woman, or chauvinistic. This chapter demonstrates that covenant women had their own relationship with the Lord and that He both honored their intention to enter into vows unto Him, and held them accountable for their vows just like He did with the men who vowed.

There is a second important spiritual principle revealed in this section that had a modifying impact on the law of the vow when either a young unmarried woman, or a married woman made a vow unto the Lord. The principle is that of the order of spiritual authority that God ordained for every household in the covenant. That order of authority identified the father as bearing spiritual authority from the Lord over his unmarried daughter, and the husband as bearing spiritual authority over his wife. The authority in both cases was granted by the Lord, from Whom all valid authority ultimately originates, to the man He ordained in the family setting to represent Him. The role of father and husband did not create their own self-generated authority, but received it from the Lord. They were given authority in the family for the good of the family. In other words, the authority they were given

was not for them to use for their own selfish desires, but to exercise in dependence upon the Lord for the wise guidance and protection of the family.

The special circumstance created by a vow made by an unmarried daughter or wife was that they might have vowed things to the Lord that they might not have the authority to fulfill. The Lord honors the true authority He had ordained for the father and husband by granting to them the right to override the vow of their daughter or wife. This is the one exception to the obligation of the vow. However, even in such cases, there was a specific time limit on the right to override the vow given. The father or husband could set aside the vow of their daughter or wife only when they first heard of the vow. If, when they first learned of the vow, they decided that the vow was not wise or good to fulfill (in other words they deemed it to be a rash vow that should never have been made), then the Lord allowed them to declare the vow null and void. The significance of the father's / husband's authority is emphasized by the refusal of the Lord to insist that the daughter / wife keep the vow no matter what. The Lord would not ignore the authority of the one He ordained to exercise authority in the family in such difficult decisions. This provision was a special protection the Lord built into the law of the vow for the sake of the women affected by this guideline.

Numbers 31

31:1-8 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people." Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the LORD'S vengeance on Midian. A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war." So there were furnished from the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand. So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword."

The Lord commanded Israel through Moses to go to war against Midian. The war was identified by the Lord as a war of vengeance. However, when Moses announced the war to Israel, he declared that it was a war of the Lord's vengeance. The reason for vengeance against Midian was for their refusal to allow Israel to pass peacefully through their territory and their participation in undermining the moral purity of many of the men of God's holy nation through the incident of Baal at Peor. Remember, Balaam had been not been allowed by the

Lord to curse Israel, and in his greedy desire to earn the promised fee from Balak he had instead concocted the plan for the women of Midian to tempt the men of Israel to compromise by participating in the illicit rites celebrated for Baal. The Lord had at that time dealt severely with the men who participated and thousands of them died under the judgment of God.

Now the Lord showed in this attack upon Midian that they did not get off scot free for their sin of defiling his holy nation in that way. What the Lord did was to judge His own people first, and then judge the worshippers of Baal after He had dealt with His own people. This follows a pattern of how the Lord deals with sin in judgment even to this day. When both the believers and unbelievers are engaged in the same serious sins, the Lord will deal first with His own people. Then, after His people have received their own punishment and turned from their sin, the Lord will then deal with the unbelievers. It reveals that the Lord holds His own people to a higher standard of accountability than the world of unbelievers. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

This battle was not simply another in a long list of natural battles in the history of human warfare. It was one of the first of a continuing series of battles in what can only properly be identified as a holy war. In our own generation, the term holy war has been captured and misapplied primarily by the Muslim world in their term Jihad, which means holy war. It is misapplied because no war ever waged by Muslims has ever been truly holy. That is simply because the Muslims do not represent the One true God, Yahweh. Instead they represent a false god, Allah, and there wars are no more holy than the Midianites who fought on behalf of Baal. On the other hand, in our modern, highly sensitive western culture, there is a tendency to label all wars under any circumstances as bad and wrong. For them, no war in history can be considered a holy war because by definition they consider all war to be unholy. What actually makes a war holy from a Biblical perspective? One factor alone determines whether a war is holy. If the Lord commands the war to be fought, then it is holy. Since the Lord is holy, when He commanded a war to be fought by His holy nation, then that war was holy. In this case, Israel was not fighting to take vengeance for themselves as so many wars in history have been. They fought for this one reason; "...to execute the LORD'S vengeance on Midian." Israel was simply the sword of the Lord chosen by Him to execute His vengeance upon Midian. This was the Lord's judgment and the results of the war were the consequences the Lord ordained for the wicked Midianites.

This battle also brought a tragic end to the story of Balaam. It was not by accident that Balaam was among those who lost their lives in this battle. This was also the Lord's death penalty judgment upon Balaam. We have seen that Balaam was a mysterious mixture of a man. He had a relationship with the Lord, yet was not part of God's covenant people. Nevertheless, the Lord chose to

speak through him with at least one significant prophetic word that stretched into the distant future and identified the coming of the future Messiah. Balaam's role as God's chosen spokesman in that one prophecy did not give Balaam a free pass regarding his own sins however. Like with Israel, the principle is that "...from everyone who has been given much, much will be required..." (Luke 12:48). Balaam compromised whatever relationship he had with the Lord by causing the spiritual and moral downfall of thousands of Israelites, resulting in their own death. God judged Balaam deserving of death for his actions. He remains forever a symbol, not of faithful obedience to the Lord, but of deadly compromise because of the love of money. "...having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;" (II Peter 2:15).

31:12-18 - "They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho. Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women? 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. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves."

Following the victory, the army of Israel returned to camp with the captive women and children of Midian. They had already slain all the men of Midian before returning. When they arrived at camp they were probably expecting to be welcomed with celebration as heroes. Instead they were met by an angry Moses and his stinging rebuke. The warriors had made the decision to spare the women and children with the plan to make the women their own wives and to adopt all the children as their own or to make them slaves to serve them. Moses had to remind them of something they had apparently already forgotten. It was these same women that had been the cause of the sinful failure in sexual compromise of thousands of their now dead fellow Israelites. The Lord would not welcome these women that had so defiled His holy nation into the covenant. The Lord pronounced the death penalty upon all of them. In addition He commanded the execution of the male children, sparing only the young females that had never been with a man.

The execution of the remainder of the males is striking and difficult to swallow due to our modern sensibilities. The bottom line is that the Lord had ordained the end of this nation of people. They would not slowly fade off the stage of history, but would come to a sudden end due to their own serious sins against the Lord. The execution of the males insured that the nation would not continue past this

generation. The young women and girls would be incorporated into the covenant nation of Israel as wives eventually.

I know that many struggle with passages such as this one. The objections usually raised are that the Lord is too harsh or mean to have ordered such a thing. However, it is necessary to resolve that objection Biblically, or else run the risk of questioning in the heart the goodness and righteousness of the Lord. The issue boils down to this: the Lord was either righteous or unrighteous to have ordered this execution. He would be unrighteous under this guideline. If the people executed did not deserve death and the Lord commanded their death anyway, then He would be unrighteous to do so. The truth is that Midian as a nation deserved death for their many and repeated violations of God's holy standards and the true mystery is not that the Lord called for their execution, but why He shows such restraint and patience to a sinful and rebellious world. The issue is no different than the one that was revealed in the great Flood of Noah's time. In the Flood, the Lord judged the entire world as deserving the death penalty and executed that penalty Himself through the waters of the Flood. Men, women and children all alike lost their lives in the waters of the Flood. The Lord was righteous to do so in spite of the protests of an entire world.

31:26-27 - "You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation."

As a result of the battle, the victorious Israelite army carried off a tremendous amount of booty, or what is also called the spoils of war. All of the gold, silver, flocks and herds of the conquered Midianites now became the possession of Israel. Through this means, by God's ordination, one nation was judged and reduced to nothing while another nation was enriched in preparation for His great purpose for them. Normally, in the ancient world, when one nation defeated another, the spoils became the property of the victorious king with some shared among the warriors who fought for him. In this case the parallel is important. The Lord was the King of Israel and they won their victory over Midian only because of His blessing. All of the booty actually belonged to the Lord. As the King, it was the Lord's right to distribute the booty however it pleased Him to do so.

The Lord chose to allow the warriors who fought and prevailed in the battle to enjoy the lion's share of the spoils. He also commanded that they count it all and distribute a portion of the spoil and share it with the entire congregation, the Levites, and the priests. In commanding this sharing of the spoils of war, the Lord established the perspective in Israel that the entire nation was involved in the warfare and all together either would suffer in defeat, or enjoy the fruits of victory. In the same way, the church is engaged in an ongoing spiritual warfare. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) of the church is a call to battle. The battle is spiritual as the gospel is established at great sacrifice by those called to carry it

to those living in spiritual darkness. The Lord promises special rewards for those who fight on the front lines in what we call missionary work. Yet, the reward that awaits on the final day is not the exclusive enjoyment of those who are missionaries. The church which supports with finances, and prays for those missionaries will share in the fruits of their gospel victories as we divide the spoils on that final day.

Numbers 32

32:1-9 - "Now the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had an exceedingly large number of livestock. So when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that it was indeed a place suitable for livestock, the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon, the land which the LORD conquered before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." They said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not take us across the Jordan. But Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here? Now why are you discouraging the sons of Israel from crossing over into the land which the LORD has given them? This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the sons of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the LORD had given them."

After a difficult forty year journey through the wilderness, Israel has been led by the Lord to the threshold of the Promised Land. They are finally on the verge of entering into the fulfillment of the hope that they have held ever since they left Egypt a generation before. The last time they were in this place years before, the entire nation with the exception of just a few cried out to turn around and return to Egypt. The Lord pronounced a death penalty judgment upon that entire first generation who refused to believe Him and obey Him. Now, the second generation, the grown children of that first generation, are given their own opportunity to follow the Lord where their parents were not willing to follow Him. The expectation is that all of them would be anxious to cross the river Jordan, enter the Promised Land, and leave the wilderness experience permanently behind them. Yet, there is an unexpected and potentially deadly development among the tribes of Israel here at this critical juncture.

The circumstance that brought this crisis to the surface was different than the many tests in the wilderness. There in the wilderness, the spiritual failures of Israel were the result of the hardships of the wilderness experience regarding

food, water and living situation as the Lord led them into circumstances of need to expose their tendency to grumble and complain. Here, there was no hardship, but rather a problem caused by their own prosperity. The tribes of Reuben and Gad had been blessed with "an exceedingly large number of livestock." Because their flocks were so great, those tribes became concerned about adequate pasture land where they would settle. The land where the nation was currently camped, which is often called the Trans-Jordan because it is just across the Jordan river, was a fertile land ideal for grazing herds and flocks. It was primarily green valleys and rolling hills and was a pleasant contrast to the harsh environment of the Sinai wilderness. After forty years in that hard wilderness, this land of Jazer and Gilead seemed to the tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad to be an ideal location for them to permanently settle. In their perspective, the Promised Land could not possibly be better than this for them, and if they settled across the Jordan in the Promised Land they would have to divide the land among the other tribes of Israel. Their natural concern was that they would be stuck with some portion of the Promised Land that was less than ideal for livestock.

They put two and two together and drew the conclusion that the beautiful land they could see was better than the promise of a land that they had not yet seen and might not be as good. The leaders of the two tribes approached Moses and Eleazar, the high priest and made an appeal to be allowed to stay and settle here outside the Promised Land. On a purely natural level their appeal was respectful and handled in an appropriate way. What they were asking made a certain sense. One of the practical, unspoken results if their appeal was granted is that the other ten tribes would ultimately benefit by gaining the extra territory in the Promised Land that Reuben and Gad would have otherwise occupied. The land they wanted was good grazing land. So, their request made a lot of sense and we might expect that Moses would be inclined to grant their request in an effort to make sure everyone received just what they wanted at the end of their journey.

The response of Moses was strong and probably caught the leaders of Reuben and Gad off guard. Moses did not see their request as a good thing at any level. He was not concerned about the natural advantages of this location for the two tribes. Moses was only concerned about one thing, the one thing that occupied all of his heart's attention was the one factor that Reuben and Gad had ignored in their own considerations. The issue for Moses boiled down to this; how would the two tribes settling here affect the Lord's purpose for all of Israel as a whole. What Moses understood, and Reuben and Gad had completely missed was that the Lord had not delivered twelve individual tribes out of Egypt. The Lord had delivered a people that He had called and formed into one unified nation. The Lord had clearly announced from the beginning that His purpose was to rescue Israel from Egypt, lead them and sustain them through the wilderness, and then lead them as a nation into the Promised Land where they would first conquer and then settle that land together. The request of the two tribes revealed that their hearts were more concerned for themselves than they were for the Lord's

purpose or for the nation. Their request exposed a me first perspective that was at the core of what the Lord had worked for forty years to change in them.

Not only was their request concerned only with themselves, they did not take account of how their request would impact the hearts of the other ten tribes. The people of God are called into a covenant community relationship with one another which gives us the great benefit of the encouragement and strength of our committed fellowship, but which also makes us vulnerable to the discouragement of disunity and selfish choices and actions among one another. Moses recognized that the other ten tribes would be discouraged by two tribes splitting off from the nation and not participating in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land. The greater of these two factors was the conquest. The contributions of Reuben and Gad were more critical for the battles ahead against the Canaanite inhabitants than they were for the settlement to follow. The adjustment of Reuben and Gad, once rebuked by Moses, was deemed sufficient by the Lord. Their offer was for the warriors of their tribes to go with the rest of Israel and fight for the land along side the other tribes. The Lord allowed them to settle in the Trans-Jordan. They settled this territory outside the Promised Land and ended up with a good life because of their faithfulness to honor their promise to participate in the conquest of Canaan. There is a lesson for us here from their example. Reuben and Gad chose good over best. Where they settled was a good place. Where they should have settled was better. The point is that the Lord's choice for them was better than what they chose for themselves. Christians who choose what seems best to them over what they know the Lord has said or chosen for them are making the same choice as Reuben and Gad.

32:10-12 - "So the LORD'S anger burned in that day, and He swore, saying, 'None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully.'"

Moses reminds Reuben and Gad here of the judgment that the previous generation received for their unbelief and disobedience. That earlier generation's relationship with the Lord is characterized by a single simple description. They did not follow the Lord fully. Caleb and Joshua are pointed out again as the exceptional examples of men from that first generation that did follow the Lord fully. Joshua and Caleb pleased the Lord and were blessed and honored by Him for following Him fully. The entire rest of the first generation died in the wilderness under the judgment of God because they did not follow Him fully. That tells us how critically important it is in the Lord's perspective to not just follow Him but follow Him fully. Just in the USA today the majority of people identify themselves as Christians and in that sense would be considered followers of the Lord. How many of that majority of the nation's population would the Lord say are following Him fully? I'm certain that the number is far smaller. When the Lord

Jesus first called His disciples, He said these simple words to them, "Follow Me." Do you think He meant that they should follow Him part way, or as long as where He led them met with their approval? Following the Lord fully is not a special calling only for a super spiritual few Christians. It is what the Lord calls every true believer to do in ongoing response to Him.

32:23 - "But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out."

This was a word of warning issued by Moses on behalf of the Lord to Reuben and Gad. They had made the commitment to leave their families in the Trans-Jordan region and to cross over Jordan with Israel and fight with the other tribes in the conquest of the Promised Land. This warning by Moses was intended to alert them to the consequences they would encounter if they failed to honor their commitment. It has, since this day that Moses first spoke it, become an often used statement in church history. It is important for us to understand its implications for our own lives. The principle is that the Lord attaches consequences to sin. Consequences don't just happen, but the Lord causes them to occur. One of the more confusing elements of the sin-consequence pattern is that the Lord determines the timing of the consequence and the consequence for a particular sin is not necessarily, and often not immediately after the sin. People often miss the spiritual connection between sin and the consequences produced by their sin because of the time delay between the sin and the consequence. If the full consequence of every sin was experienced immediately after sinning people would see the connection much more readily, but the delay between sin and consequence is also an expression of God's mercy and grace in our lives.

The truth of this warning still applies. Sin will bring an appropriate consequence. Your sin will find you out. This means that there is no way to hide from the consequences. Countless sins are committed under the cloak of darkness or secrecy because the one committing the sin has convinced themselves that they will get away with crossing God's boundary lines of righteousness without having to suffer any consequence. No one ultimately gets away with anything. God sees it all and God ordains the necessary consequence for it all. Even for those who are hiding from God, their deserved consequence will track them down and find them out in due time.