

LESSON 12

PREPARATION FOR ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

Numbers 22:1–36:13

Aim

To become acquainted with what happened on the plains of Moab, north of the Dead Sea and east of Jordan.

Balak and Balaam

Numbers 22:1–24:25

Balak's invitations to Balaam (22:2-21). —Balak, king of Moab, was filled with fear by the advancing Israelites. He attempted to hire a diviner, Balaam, from Syria to place a curse on Israel. The fees for divination were offered to Balaam; however, he was restrained divinely from bringing the curse upon the Israelites. Balaam became aware that the people were destined to be blessed, and he reported that the Lord had refused to let him go with the messengers from Moab and Midian. Because of his urgent need for Balaam's help, Balak sent a larger embassy composed of distinguished leaders to offer richer gifts. Balaam replied that he could not accompany them without Yahweh's permission. However, permission was granted that night, perhaps in a dream.

Balaam's ass (22:22-35) —A problem is raised in verse 22 by the implication that Balaam was accompanying the leaders of Moab without God's consent. The incident involving Balaam's ass and the angel of the Lord was to serve the purpose of impressing upon Balaam the fact that he was not to oppose the purposes of God. The contest between Israel and Moab included the contest between the divine power of God to bless and the power of the adversary to curse. The outcome would establish the supremacy of the God of Sinai over the demonic powers. Although Balaam was not a member of the covenant people, he was used to bless them. Israel's God was able to use outsiders to accomplish His purposes. The incident on the way to Moab revealed to Balaam that he was already under the power of Israel's God. Three times his donkey turned aside from the angel of the Lord whom Balaam could not see. After beating the animal, Balaam was given sight to see the angel with the sword who blocked his path. The story has a note of humour in the fact that Balaam's donkey had more insight than he had.

The first oracle (22:41–23:12).—Balaam was taken to a sacred high place, probably a shrine to the god Baal of Peor. He could see part of Israel's camp below. He requested that seven altars be prepared for the sacrifice of bulls and rams. Perhaps he thought the burnt offerings would influence God to grant a curse on Israel. He went apart to receive the revelation from God. The word from the Lord was a word of blessing instead of a curse. Balak was distressed by the fact that his enemies had been blessed instead of cursed. Balaam answered that he could only speak what the Lord had put into his mouth.

The second oracle (23:13-26).—Balak was determined that Israel would be cursed; therefore, he proposed the strategy of

Israel's God used Balaam, who was not one of the covenant people, to accomplish His

_____ (purposes)

offering sacrifices at a new shrine to bring about the curse. The new location was at the top of Pisgah, and the offering of bulls and rams was repeated. The Lord spoke to Balaam, who informed Balak that the Lord's command to bless could not be revoked. Because of the presence of her God, Israel was to be strong like the wild ox of the desert or the lion which takes prey when it will. When Balaam gave the report of the Lord's revelation to Balak, Balak pleaded with him neither to curse nor to bless Israel. Balaam answered that he must do whatever the Lord spoke.

The third oracle (23:27-24:9).—In spite of the continued protests of Balaam, Balak again tried the strategy of moving the place of ritual. The ritual of the seven altars was held a third time on the top of Peor. Balaam was convinced that seeking a curse against Israel was hopeless. He made no attempt to seek omens of divination, but he turned towards Israel's camp and was anointed by the Spirit of God to speak the third oracle which describes the beauty and strength of Israel. It appears to be addressed to Israel instead of Balak. His vision of Israel's prosperity included a well-watered garden, a luxuriant oasis in the wilderness, and the victory of Israel's king over the Amalekites (v. 7). The oracle ended by acknowledging that not only had God elected Israel to receive His blessings, but anyone who attempted to curse Israel would bring a curse upon himself.

The fourth oracle (24:10-19).—Balak became enraged. His whole scheme not only failed but boomeranged. Balaam reminded Balak that the first envoy had been informed that the Lord would not allow him to do anything against Israel. Before returning home, he gave a fourth oracle telling of the doom of Moab. He described the vision as coming from God while he was in a trance (vv. 15-16). He spoke of a "star" coming from Jacob and of a "sceptre" rising from Israel. The star referred to a royal person, traditionally interpreted as David and later applied to the Messiah. The victories described in the oracle fit best into the time of David.

Three brief oracles (24:20-25).—Balaam predicted the fate of the Amalekites and the Kenites as well as Asshur and Eber. He spoke of ships coming from the coast of Kittim. The third oracle may have referred to the people of the sea who overran Ugarit. The Amalekites were nomadic people in the desert to the south of Palestine. They were defeated by Gideon (Judg. 7), Saul (1 Sam. 15), and David.

Israel's Unfaithfulness at Peor Numbers 25:1-18

While Israel was dwelling at Shittim, the people played the harlot with the daughters of Moab. The incident probably involved the worship of Chemosh, the god of Moab. After seducing the Israelite men, the Moabite women invited them to participate in the sacred meals. The ritual of communion and fellowship with the deity of Peor revealed Israel's infidelity to Yahweh. The punishment was death to those who bowed down before Baal of Peor.

A second act of unfaithfulness was committed by an Israelite with a Midianite woman. A number of Israelites were gathered at the Tent of Meeting, weeping before the Lord. The people were suffering from a plague, perhaps because of the previous incident. A Midianite woman named Cozbi was brought into the camp and was taken apparently as a bride by an Israelite (v. 6). To intermarry with foreign women devoted to other gods would lead to the corruption of Israel's faith. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, slew both the man and the woman with a spear. The very life of Israel as the chosen people of God had been threatened. Phinehas took drastic but wise action in ending the threat. The

During the time of Balak and Balaam, God had elected Israel to receive His _____, and anyone who attempted to curse Israel would bring a _____ upon himself.

(blessings, curse)

Worship of Baal of Peor revealed infidelity to Yahweh and was punishable by _____.

(death)

An Israelite man and Midianite woman who apparently married were killed by Phinehas to halt corruption of Israel's _____ in Yahweh.

(faith)

plague among the people ceased. God's covenant was given to Phinehas as a promise, and the priesthood was assigned perpetually to his descendants.

The Second Census

Numbers 26:1-65

The first census took place at the beginning of the wandering in the desert and the second at the end. Since the census was for military purposes, it included those twenty years old and older (v. 2). The names of the clans given were based on the list in Genesis 46:8-28. The census revealed a sharp decrease in the tribe of Simeon and a large increase in the tribe of Manasseh. The census of the Levites was taken separately. Five Levitical families, in addition to Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, are given.

The Daughters of Zelophehad

Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-13

The laws of Israel provided for land to remain with the same family. If property was sold, it reverted to the original family in the fiftieth year. The law of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-10) required a deceased man's brother to take his wife and raise a son for the deceased. No law, however, had been established to provide for the inheritance of a man's property if he had daughters only. The daughters of Zelophehad, a descendant of Manasseh, provided a test case. Zelophehad had died a natural death, leaving no son to share in the inheritance of the property in the Promised Land. A new law was stated, giving the daughters of a family the right to inherit property when there was no son. If a man had no sons or daughters, his inheritance was to go to his brothers. The case was studied again in chapter 36 upon the request of the Gileadite clan, which pointed out that if the daughters married outside the tribe, the property would become the possession of a new tribe. Since the land was the gift of the Lord to the tribe, Moses commanded that daughters who inherited property were permitted to marry only within the tribe. The inheritance of one tribe was not to be transferred to another.

The Appointment of Joshua

Numbers 27:12-23

Moses was permitted to see the Promised Land from Abarim (mountains in Transjordan), specifically named Mount Nebo in Deuteronomy 34:1 and Pisgah in Deuteronomy 3:27. Moses was reminded that his rebellion against the command of God prevented his entering the Promised Land.

Moses expressed concern over the selection of a successor. Joshua was named, and Moses was instructed to lay his hands on Joshua. He would be commissioned before the priest Eleazar and the congregation of Israel. In addition to charging Joshua concerning his duties, Moses was to bestow on Joshua some of his own authority. The ordination service before the congregation was to impress upon the people that Joshua was the chosen successor. The procedure of ordination then established is still followed: (1) God reveals His selection of the leader; (2) the Spirit of God endows the chosen with qualities needed for an office; (3) the chosen leader is publicly set apart in a religious ceremony which includes the laying on of hands; and (4) the congregation observes the ordination and accepts the divinely appointed leader. Although Joshua was the successor of Moses, he was not Moses' equal. Moses had received instruction directly from God; Joshua was to be directed by the priests who would use the sacred lot, the Urim.

As a result of the case of Zelophehad who died and left no son, a new law came into being which gave daughters of a family the right to _____

(inherit property)

Complete the steps in the procedure of ordination.

1. _____ reveals His selection of the _____.
2. The _____ of _____ endows the chosen with _____ needed.
3. The chosen leader is publicly set apart in a religious ceremony which includes the _____.
4. The _____ observes the ordination and accepts the divinely appointed leader.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Rules for Public Worship and Vows

Numbers 28:1–30:16

A detailed list of the offerings—including animal sacrifices and cereal and drink offerings—and the seasons in which they were to be brought to the Temple are given. Most of the details concerning the laws are also recorded in Leviticus and previous sections of Numbers.

Chapter 30 is devoted primarily to vows made by women. A vow committed a person to a special deed or gift for God, to abstinence, or to withdrawal from normal life. The Hebrew believed that a man's word bound him to an unbreakable commitment. He was unconditionally bound by a vow of any kind. A woman was bound to her vows to the Lord unless they conflicted with the rights of the father or husband. A man had the power to cancel his wife's or daughter's vows. Vows were not required by Hebrew law, but Hebrew law required them to be kept once they were made.

The War Against Midian

Numbers 31:1-54

The war against Midian is often described as a holy war since the captives and booty belonged to Yahweh and were either devoted entirely to Him and destroyed or preserved at His will in whole or in part. The Midianites seemed to have been a settled people on the plains of Moab. They were pictured earlier in the Pentateuch as nomadic people near the Gulf of Aqabah. The reason given for destroying the Midianites was that they caused Israel to sin at Shittim (v. 16).

Moses selected a thousand men from each tribe for the army which was to be led by Phinehas. Phinehas was to take with him the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets as symbols of the nature of the campaign. Usually the Ark was used to symbolize the presence of God. The campaign was a success with every Midianite man slain, including five kings. Although the Midianite cities, camps, and men were destroyed, the women and children were captured. Moses was angry when he heard that all the women had been kept alive. He commanded that only the virgins be spared to be wives for the Israelites. Perhaps Moses remembered the earlier apostasy caused by the Moabite and Midianite women.

The Israelites were to stay outside the camp for seven days to rid themselves of uncleanness. The spoils of war which could withstand fire were to be passed through fire for cleansing. They were also to be purified by water along with the spoils which could not withstand fire.

The latter half of the chapter deals with the disposition of the booty. It was to be divided equally between the army and the congregation, including a portion for the priests and Levites. The jewelry was contributed by the officers and placed in the Tent of Meeting as a memorial to the Lord who had given Israel the victory.

The emphases of the story are the vengeance on Midian, the rites of purification, and the disposition of the booty. The story reveals the zeal of the Lord against those who oppose His purpose. Israel's victories were really the victories of the Lord. The booty actually belonged to the Lord.

The Assignment of Transjordan to Reuben and Gad

Numbers 32:1-32

The request of Reuben and Gad to settle in the good cattle

Circle the correct word.

A (man, woman) was unconditionally bound by a vow of any kind.

(Circle man)

True or False.

A man could cancel his wife's or daughter's vows.

(True)

A war in which the captives and booty belonged to Yahweh and were destroyed or preserved at His will was termed a "_____."

(holy war)

The battle against the Midianites was led by _____, the priest.

(Phinehas)

Vessels of the sanctuary and trumpets were taken along into battle against the Midianites which indicated that it was a _____.

(holy war)

Because of their devotion to other gods, all Midianite women were slain except the _____.

(virgins)

Israel's victories can be attributed to the _____.

(Lord)

country east of the Jordan angered Moses. Their request threatened the united campaign of the twelve tribes against the Canaanites. They were more interested in their own prosperity than in the destiny of Israel. Reuben and Gad responded to Moses' anger with a plan to settle their families and flocks in walled cities after which the men would join the other tribes in the conquest of the land. The plan was agreeable to Moses.

Since the land was a gift from God to the people, a religious ritual was necessary to assign officially the land to the tribes. Half of the tribe of Manasseh was also given land in Transjordan, north of the Jabbok.

A Review of the Journey from Egypt to Canaan

Numbers 33:1-49

This section constitutes an important historical section since it lists the sites of Israel's encampments. Forty sites are listed in depicting the journey from Rameses to Sinai, from Sinai to Kadesh, and from Kadesh around the southern end of the Dead Sea to the east of Canaan. Only two dates are given: the beginning of the journey on the fifteenth day of the first month and Aaron's death at Mount Hor on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year (v. 38). The historical record is attributed to Moses (v. 2).

Instructions Concerning the Conquest and Settlement of Canaan

Numbers 33:50-34:29

The Israelites were instructed when they entered the land of Canaan to destroy all of the Canaanites and their idols. They were warned that Canaanites who were permitted to remain in the land would be the sources of future affliction (v. 55). The Canaanite pagan faith would be a threat to Israel's loyalty to Yahweh.

Chapter 34 describes the division of the Promised Land which was to be under the direction of the Lord; no tribe was to claim its own land. The boundaries were to extend from the southern border of the Dead Sea, southwest along the border of Edom, across the Wilderness of Zin to Kadesh-barnea, northwest to the Brook of Egypt and to the Mediterranean Sea. The northern boundary has not been definitely identified. Some believe the border was close to Lebanon; others believe it was much farther south. The eastern boundary was the Jordan. Eleazar and Joshua were responsible for dividing the land among the tribes.

The Levitical Cities

Numbers 35:1-34

Since the Levites were not to inherit a portion of the land, special arrangements had to be made concerning places for them to live. Cities were granted to them out of the lots for the other tribes. Forty-eight sections of about 207 acres each, with a city in the midst of each, were to be given to the Levites. Six were designated as cities of refuge (v. 6). Verses 9-34 set forth the laws which governed the cities of refuge. A man who accidentally killed another could flee to a city of refuge and remain in protective custody until his trial was held by the elders of his city. If he was proved innocent, he could remain safely in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest; this was general amnesty. Afterwards, he was free to return to his own city. If he was guilty of murder or left the city, he would be executed by the avenger of

Numbers 33:50-56 records God's instructions to _____

the inhabitants of Canaan and _____ their idols.

(drive out, destroy)

According to Numbers 34:16-17, the two men who were responsible under God's direction for dividing the land among the tribes were:

_____ and _____

(Eleazar, Joshua)

How many cities of refuge were there? _____

(Six)

blood. The nearest kinsman of a slain man became the prosecutor or avenger of blood. The land of the tribe of a slain man was considered polluted until expiated by the blood of the murderer. The law providing for the avenger of blood was designed to regulate murder, and the cities of refuge were to regulate and control legal killings based on vengeance.

The cities of refuge were to_____ and_____ legal killings based on vengeance.

(regulate, control)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading Numbers 22–36 and the study manual, answer the following questions.

1. What theological purpose is revealed by the incident of Balaam's ass and the angel of the Lord? _____

2. What is revealed concerning Israel's God in the story of Balak and Balaam?

3. Why did Phinehas slay the Israelite man and the Midianite woman? _____

4. What is the purpose of the story of Zelophehad? _____

5. How does the ordination of Joshua compare with contemporary ordination procedures? _____

6. In chapter 30, how did the vow made by a man differ from the one made by a woman? _____

7. What is meant by "holy war"? _____

8. Why did the priest Phinehas lead in the battle against Midian? _____

9. Why did Moses allow only Midianite virgins to be spared? _____

10. Why was Israel to destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan? _____

11. How did the cities of refuge contribute to justice? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). Draw a map of the Promised Land, showing the division of the Land among the tribes.

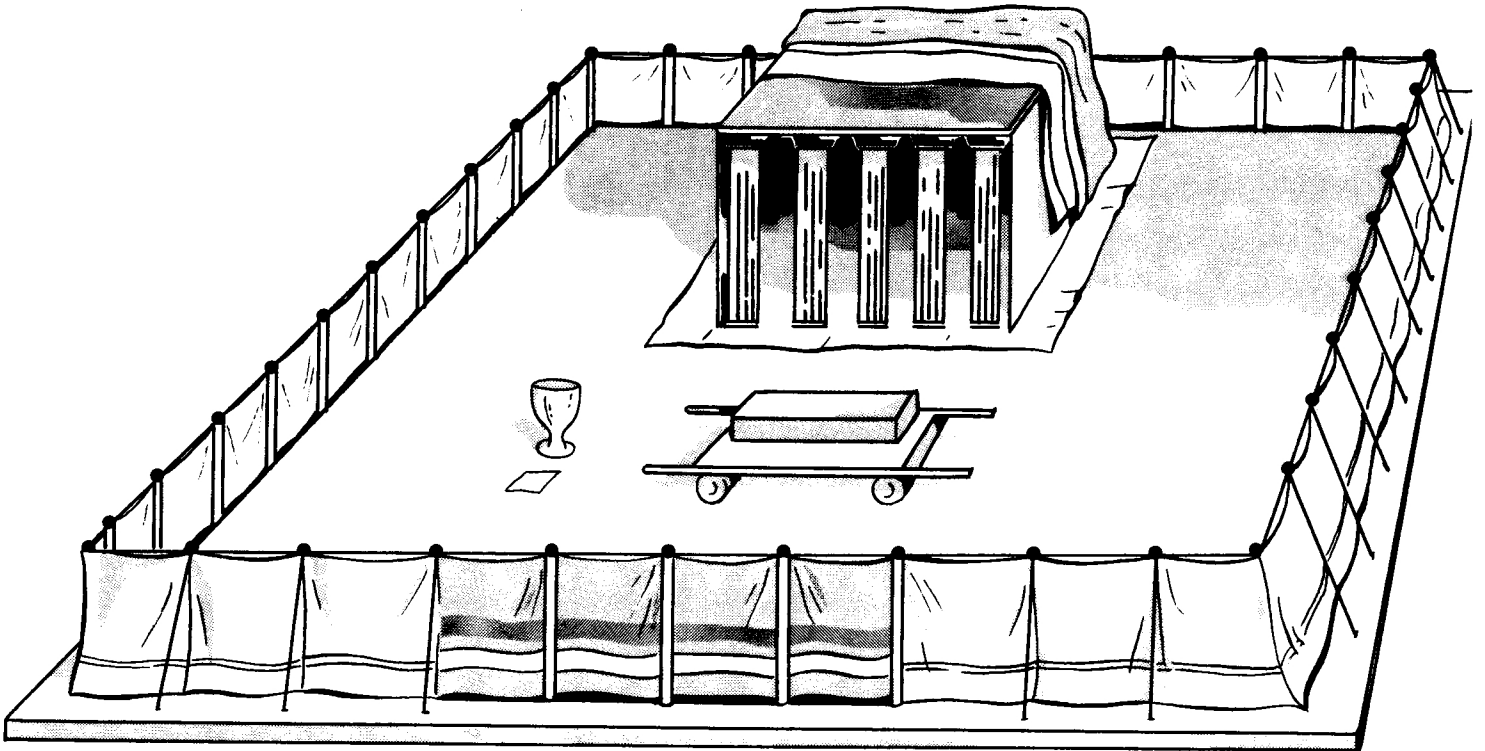
Seminar Discussion

1. In the light of the material presented in this lesson, what was Israel's concept of her God?
2. Evaluate the laws regulating the inheritance of property. Would these laws be applicable to your contemporary situation?
3. Was God justified in having the Israelites destroy the Moabites and Canaanites?
4. What do the rules regarding vows reveal about the equality of man and woman in Israel's society?
5. How do ordination procedures now differ from the ordination of Joshua?

APPENDIX A

A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE TABERNACLE

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APPENDIX B

THE TABERNACLE AND ITS COURTS

Prepared by Elaine Herrin

