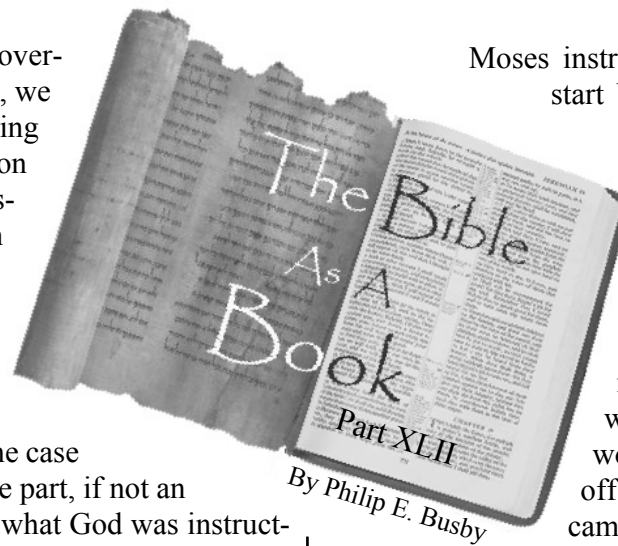


As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we ended our last segment talking about the incident where Aaron and Miriam attempted to question Moses' leadership with the argument they too had heard the voice of God and prophesied. They also questioned Moses' purity in that he had a wife who was not of Israel, and made the case they should at least have some part, if not an equal footing with Moses, in what God was instructing the nation to do. God would be the one who would deal with their challenge and make it clear no one had a relationship with Him like Moses. No matter how much anyone thought they were a prophet, Moses was the leader God had chosen to work through! After waiting for Miriam to be clear of the leprosy she was plagued with for questioning Moses, and in doing so God Himself, the camp moved on through the wilderness of Paran, bringing them very close to the promised land. This brought us through Numbers chapter 12, and we will begin this segment with chapter 13 verse 1.

At this point, Israel had made it so close to the south end of the promised land, which was that part their forefathers had most predominantly lived in, that it was time to begin the process of scouting out the land for the sake of beginning to take it as God had promised to give it to them. As Moses was instructed by God to accomplish this scouting mission, God told him to send one man from each tribe, and each one needed to be a leader among their tribe. This would ensure every tribe had someone they respected who would be a firsthand witness to see the land and could convey to, as well as represent, that tribe's opinion concerning the land. The specific names of the twelve men are told to us along with the tribe they were from. In listing these names and tribes, one will note again that there is no representative from Levi, as they were God's tribe. Thus, the twelve men were from the other eleven sons of Jacob, with Joseph being two tribes in Ephraim and Manasseh. The two names which stand out from this group is Caleb, who was of the tribe of Judah, and Oshea of the tribe of Ephraim, whom Moses called "Jehoshua."



Moses instructs the men to specifically start by going up into the mountains of the south end, and as they covered the overall land they were to report on what kind of people lived in the land, whether they were weak or strong; if the land was heavily populated or sparse; whether they successfully worked the land or just lived off it; whether they lived in encampments of tents or had built cities. As to the land itself, they were to specifically report on whether it was naturally fertile and productive or more desert like, and if there were forests to provide wood or not. Now, this scouting would be done in the seasonal time period right around the Feast of Weeks, meaning there would be plenty of fresh fruits and produce ripe for the picking, and these men were to be brave in their going through the land, even bringing back samples of the produce they found. All this would show what kind of life Israel could expect to build for themselves when the land became their home.

The men would set out and search the land from its south end and go all the way north, even above the area around what is best known to Bible students as the Sea of Galilee. This allowed them to see much of the same route Abraham had no doubt taken as he entered the land coming down from Haran, and the land extending about as far north as Israel would ever hold with any consistency once they conquered it. After seeing this path, the twelve would have a better sense of the land's configuration, and they would return south scouting more of the population centers, specifically Hebron, which was a very old city and predated a city they knew as the oldest in Egypt. Hebron was also one of the places Abraham had lived, and they would see how the descendants of the people Abraham had sojourned among had built and populated this area since then. This would give them a true idea of the way this land had been settled, used, and maintained over a long period of time. One of the greatest evidence of the land's ability to produce, without being over worked by the people who had lived there for so long, was that the spies came to a brook where they found grapevines with large grapes

that did not even compare to the small species they had known as grapes in Egypt. This place would be named for being a waterway, the valley of which contained such old growth vines as to produce such amazing size fruit! The specimen of the vine they cut from there to take with them, along with the other produce of the land they had gathered, had only one cluster of grapes on it which was so heavy, but at the same time the vine itself so substantial in size, they used the vine to carry the cluster between two of them as if the vine was a staff made for the purpose.

These men would spend forty days in their journey through the land and return to Moses and the rest of the nation with both the physical specimens that had been asked for as well as information about the land and people in it. Their report on the land itself was to emphasize it did not fail in any way to live up with what God had told them about the kind of land He was taking them to, for they described it as truly flowing with milk and honey. However, their report of the people living in the land showed they were no less impressed by them. In their opinion the people were very strong and they lived in fortified cities which were impressive. They had specifically seen the very first people Israel would have to contend with in order to take the land at the south end, including those living in the mountains, where it would seem Israel was to enter. They also reported that it would do no good to avoid this area, as there were others who lived along the coastal lands of the Mediterranean as well as the banks of the Jordan River valley. There was simply no point of entry where they would not be faced with strong people who already claimed the land!

As they gave their report, it became obvious the facts about the people in the land were being taken in the wrong way. Instead of being looked at as a good thing that proved the land could support Israel with no problem whatsoever, it was being seen as only a blockade the nation did not want to face. Caleb took the lead in attempting to settle them all down and turn the children of Israel back to the true meaning, with the encouragement it was something they should waste no time in going up to possess for themselves, along with the fact there should be no doubt they were able to take the land from the people already there! Unfortunately, most all the others who had gone up with Caleb were of the opinion there was no

way the children of Israel stood a chance against the people of the land. They even used the good report about the land's ability to produce and sustain people as a reason for the people already living there being so large and strong, even if it were a fact Israel outnumbered the people, Israel was only like an army of insects against giants in comparison.

This essentially started an all-out panic among the people. It started as regret that they had come so far only to find this out. It grew as they began to blame Moses and Aaron, even making the assertion they would rather have died in Egypt or the wilderness. All this eventually came to the accusation Moses and Aaron had no idea what they were talking about, because God would not have brought them all this way just so the men could be killed and the women and children taken as slaves. They decided it would be better to attempt a return to Egypt than go forward following Moses, and for this they even proposed the people choose a new leader who could help them do exactly that! In hearing all this, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in sorrow of their own and to express how much the people needed to repent of these thoughts. At that point Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes to express the same, and being two of the men who had seen the land, they stepped forward together to explain to the people what a good land God had brought them to. They explained the last thing Israel should do is rebel against God no matter what their feelings in the moment. They tried to be the voice of reason about how much The Great God Who had brought them this far was well able to fight for them, and in looking at it that way they need not fear the people of the land, but see all of it as just extra blessings The Lord intended to give Israel.

This was only taken as an insult, and the people were of the opinion the two men deserved to be stoned for saying such things. All this while Israel had been ignoring the pillar of God's presence that was constantly with them, and so at this point God would show forth His glory from out of the tabernacle in a way they could not ignore! God begins to speak with Moses from the perspective that Moses had actually taken responsibility for the people at Mt. Sinai. God asks Moses how long he thinks God should tolerate the people continually doubting Him, and how many miracles God had to do before the people would believe He was able to do all things!

These are rhetorical questions, and God goes on to inform Moses He will grant the people's wish and kill them right there in the wilderness. In rejecting them, God tells Moses He would replace the nation in the same way He wanted to at Mt. Sinai by building a nation starting with Moses, and it would be even stronger than Israel was. Upon hearing this, Moses, once again, steps into the gap and pleads for God's mercy. The big difference this time around is that Moses had to do this in full view of the nation; and thus, they saw how much they actually should be thankful for Moses!

Israel heard Moses' words about how all the people in Canaan and the surrounding area had already heard of how great God was/is and the fact He was among Israel, leading them with His direct presence. At the same time, Moses makes it clear the foundation for his plea that God spare the people is so God is not blamed or accused of being unable to bring the people into the land, leaving the impression that any of the false gods of this world are greater than The One True God Who led Israel. Moses then pleads for God to use the opportunity to instead show what a God of mercy He is. Moses makes it clear he was not asking for God to be put at risk of being accused of pardoning the guilty, but to show Himself in forgiving Israel as He had all through the wilderness, as well as be The God Who gives people many chances to repent (as God had said in giving the Ten Commandments), even across more than one generation who continues to make the same mistake. (Ex. 20:1-6, 34:4-7)

God would respond by granting Moses' request in the same way he had requested it, for it was God's intent to fill not just Israel but the entire earth with His glory! To show He was/is a God of mercy but not a God of pardoning the guilty, the fact Israel had been given the opportunity to see God's power and were the ones who doubted Him would now be their downfall. God made it clear none of the people who had doubted Him were going to go into the land. God specifies the group who would survive would include Caleb, because while he may not have had the opportunity Joshua had to show himself during earlier events, Caleb showed himself in this situation to be a man the nation knew stood on God's side! Thus, God also specifies Caleb and his family would go forward to be a great people in the land. This was very pro-

phetic in that Caleb was the man of leadership skills who had been chosen from the tribe of Judah to be one of the twelve spies.

Because Israel was currently so close to the people in the land and God had no intent of allowing those of Israel who had doubted Him to enter it, and thus, not willing to give Israel victory in war over those from it who might come against Israel, God instructs the nation turn around and head back south in much the direction they had come. God would also speak to Moses and Aaron about the details of the punishment Israel would face. God told them that everyone of the nation who had reached the age of twenty and up would be held accountable and not be allowed to see the promised land. These would die wandering in the wilderness. The two exceptions would be Caleb and Joshua who had believed, and the other ten men who had scouted the promised land would die by a plague God sent upon them. The spies' forty days of being in the promised land would turn into forty years of the nation waiting to take the land. God would not specifically kill them, He would not allow enemies to slaughter them, but the wilderness itself would consume them year after year. Thus, it would primarily be the children (who the congregation felt were going to be taken as slaves by those living in the land if they had tried to fight them) who would one day take the promised land. However, they too would have to endure these forty years of wandering in the wilderness, but in doing so they would learn how to trust God.

Moses tells the people all these words that God had spoken about what would happen to them, and again, they mourn greatly. However, in adding rebellion upon rebellion the people would get up in the morning with a totally new attitude. Instead of fearing the people of the land, they determined they had finally made it to the promised land and they would not turn back just because they had sinned. Instead, they would go forward to fight. Moses warns them God had already made His will clear and would not give them victory, but they just did not get the message it was only by the power of God, which they should have trusted in the first place, that they would be able to fight the people. They ignored Moses' warning, and while Moses and the Ark of the Covenant did not move, the people went up into the hills to fight. They were not successful and ended up

fleeing to the west. The enemy pursued and continued to kill them all the way to a place about half way between the hills where they had started and the seacoast.

After this, Israel traveled back into the wilderness, and God wasted no time continuing to give Moses specifics about how to conduct themselves in following the Law of God. Here God lays out the specific measurements of plant-based offerings to be brought and offered with an animal burnt offering, whether to perform a vow, offer a freewill offering, or on a feast day. While much of this information is given in other places in instructions about how to perform different ceremonies and offerings brought for various reasons, God does not want sacrifices at the tabernacle to become just the slaughter of animals like the pagans did. He did not want them to lose or forget the plant-based parts that made up the whole of every animal sacrifice. If they felt no specific had been given for a particular animal sacrifice, God gives this list which makes it clear what the measurements of the flour, the oil to be mingled with the flour, and the wine to be offered with each animal was to be. The measurements went up as the value of the animal increased. Meaning a bullock would require the most, it would be less for a ram, and least for a lamb. Each individual animal required these specific amounts to be offered. Meaning if you brought more than one lamb, each had to have these same measured portions of plant-based offering brought with them. It also did not matter if the one bringing the offering was a person born into the nation or a person who had come to live as part of the nation, the amounts were to be the same.

Keeping a focus on personal knowledge of God's Law, God gives further instructions on offerings that do not include animal sacrifice. On the feast of First-fruits Israel was to bring the very first sheaves of the very first grain harvest of the year to offer before The Lord at the temple. Here God also specifies that as they prepare the grain for storage in separating it from the stock, they should take the first of it to the priest to be a heave offering before The Lord. At whatever point they got around to making the first flour and using it to make bread, there was/is also to be a cake made from that first batch of dough, and it was to be heave offered to The Lord as well. In each generation, this was to be done in order to not just

thank The Lord for providing the harvest, but also in giving strength to come to the day when the processed portions of the harvest could be used to sustain the nation!

These kinds of details are followed by the specification the congregation might not sin just willfully or ignorantly in a specific way at a specific time which required certain offerings, but the congregation as a whole might simply come to understand there is some detail of the Law they had failed or been failing to recognize, or had been doing wrong. In such a case, the way to get back on track was not to just begin to do things right, but to acknowledge they had failed. To do this, they were to bring one young bullock for a burnt offering and a young goat for a sin offering, each one having the appropriate plant-based offerings along with them. The priests would offer these offerings as the Law prescribed for such sacrifices, and God would forgive the entire congregation, both those blood born and those who sojourned among the nation.

The same thing that happened to the congregation might happen to an individual, in that they come to realize there was some detail of the Law they did not fully understand or they had been failing to follow. In such a case, the individual's sin would not fall on the entire congregation, but the individual was also not to simply begin to do right, they were to first acknowledge they had failed. For this they were to bring a female goat of the first year for a sin offering, along with all its plant-based elements. The priest would offer it according to the Law, and God would forgive the individual for their failing. However, if any individual was found to be making the choice to ignore or refuse to follow any particular part of the Law, no matter what their reason for doing so, that person would not be excused by offering an offering at some point. Such a one was to be separated out from the nation as one who was no longer part of it. All this, again, was to be true for both the blood born in the nation as well as for one who came to be a part of it from the outside.

These instructions are directly followed by an example of an individual doing exactly what was just covered. A man was found, out gathering wood on the Sabbath. This being work that should only be done on other days of the week, those who saw him

doing it brought him to Moses and Aaron. Not knowing what such an offense was worthy of, they detained the man so Moses could take time to ask God. Because this offense was obviously a willful act of disobedience to God's Law on the man's part, God tells Moses the man's offense was worthy of death. In order to show how serious God was about the people not taking God's Laws lightly, this was to be done by the congregation, who was to stone the man to death. Thus, the man was taken out of the camp and stoned by the congregation just as Moses had been told they should.

Now, after all the rebellion that had taken place and this latest incident of seeing how seriously God wants Israel to take every commandment He had given them to follow, God tells Moses to give the people an instruction that is a little softer than what we might call a commandment. Moses was basically to challenge the people that if they really desired to be God's people, they should show it outwardly on their clothing. To do this, they were to build into, or at the very least attach to, some edge piece of their clothing something extra that did not need to be there. This would not be like a piece of jewelry, but something most today would understand better by relating it to more in the line of putting a flower in one's chest pocket or pinning a corsage on a girl. The difference would be these pieces for Israel were to be at an edge of the clothing, such as at the hem of a sleeve or bottom edge of the garment. It could also be at a corner such as a shoulder. In any case, the meaning was clearly so one could show others they were in a relationship with God, are dedicated to His service, and belong to Him.

This extra piece would likely be a tassel of some kind, or in the case of a shoulder piece, a ribbon or rope like attachment that hung off or went around the shoulder. However this extra piece was created, it was to be made of or, at least, have the royal color blue (or what some might call a purple) running through it in a way that made it distinctively visible. The fact it was to be an extra piece was first to make it clear this had been added on purpose, which is something people did not waste material to do for just everyday clothing, with the exception of possibly the rich. Second, being an extra piece also meant it might swing or move in some way, especially being at an edge. This would draw attention to it for

both the one seeing it on a person as well as for the person wearing it. All this was important because this was not just a message to those seeing it, but also to the one wearing it. Every time you saw someone wearing clothing that included this element (which if all in the nation did it that would be a lot of times through each day), or anytime it caught the attention of one wearing it, it would remind people of the Laws God gave to them and how important they were/are to the way they live and had lived every moment of their lives!

The reminder was to help Israel not make the mistake of forgetting God's Law in general, by thinking about them always. It was to help in those times they thought about making decisions after their own thoughts instead of according to God's Law or by seeking His guidance. Looking pretty much only to one's own judgment and desires is how one lives their life normally, but it is not how we are to live after we give our lives to God! Thus, it reminded Israel they were to be separate from the rest of the world for the purposes of God, in other words, "holy." They were not seeking to fit in. Even if wearing such an item was in and of itself something one found hard to add to the personal style they liked to wear, which would come into play in our day as God had said to do this throughout their generations, one was to ignore this in order to wear what God had asked. Another specific point God wanted to use this symbol to remind Israel of was/is the fact that even after everything they had gone through, and the punishment they would now endure as they traveled forty years in the wilderness, God was still their God. He had brought them out of the land of Egypt so they could be a specific people known to be God's people. He wanted to use their lives for a purpose, as He does all who serve Him, and that would never change!

Let's stay in God's Word!

