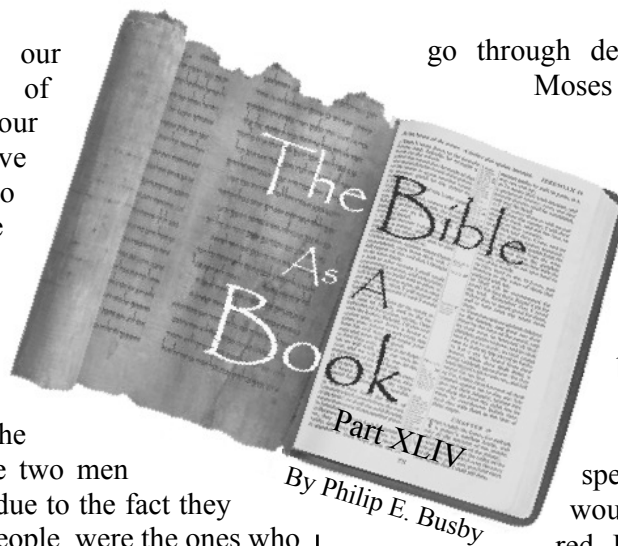


As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we discussed in our last segment the very negative response the people had to being led back into the wilderness after refusing to trust God and go into the promised land. Their response was mostly to challenge Moses and Aaron's leadership over the nation, as they blamed these two men for what had befallen them, due to the fact they would not accept they, as a people, were the ones who doubted God. As God dealt with those who led this challenge, the people then blamed Moses and Aaron for what God had done, and many of the people were killed by a plague God sent among them, which was only stopped by Moses and Aaron's intercession for the people. After this, we covered how God showed the congregation that Aaron was the man whose family would always be the High Priests, by showing the miracle of Aaron's rod being the only one that blossomed. This entire segment showed how serious it was that God had put the responsibility of the priesthood on Aaron's family, as we ended with even the instructions of how priests were to pay their tithe and remain holy before The Lord or pay for it with their lives. This brought us through Numbers chapter 18, and we are ready to start chapter 19.

Earlier in the law God had given many instructions about what made a person or thing ceremonially unclean, along with what needed to be done before a person or items (if possible because some items by law had to be destroyed) could be considered clean again. When it came to such things as people with diseases who had been declared healed by the priests, there were more extensive ceremonies that took place. However, for most things that made a person unclean, simply washing one's clothing, and often their body, in water was all that was needed to be declared clean again once evening came. After all the trouble the people had gone through with not understanding they needed an intermediary between them and God in doubting the establishment of a single High Priest in particular, God adds an extra element in chapter 19 for how people and things can be declared clean. This element would show them that not only did they need an intermediary to come before God, but to truly get back to God they themselves would have to



go through death. For this, God instructs Moses and Aaron to have the people bring a special offering of a red heifer to be sacrificed in an unusual way. This heifer was not to have been one used to do work, and, of course, a perfect specimen as all animal sacrifices were to be.

One very different specification was that this animal would need to be a specific color - red. It was to be a female that had not born any offspring. It also would not be sacrificed on the altar of burnt offering nor even within the tabernacle's grounds. Instead, this heifer would be given to the priest next in line to become the High Priest. This was so the High Priest himself would not be made unclean by the process needed for this offering; and the fact an offering would make the priest unclean makes this a very unusual offering indeed! However, at this time that man was Aaron's son Eleazar, and he was to take the heifer outside the camp. The priest would also not be the one to kill this sacrifice, but another person would kill the animal under the oversight of the priest. The priest would then take blood from this sacrifice and sprinkle it before the door of the tabernacle seven times. All this was to symbolize the completion of an individual's life as all of us will stand before God at the end of our lives. The heifer was red to represent life's blood. The animal being a female represented the fact humans are to be the bride, not the groom, when it comes to our relationship with God. It would be killed outside, not just the tabernacle, but the camp as well, because our death separates us from this life. The priest would not kill the animal because it is up to us if we have presented our lives a living sacrifice unto God or not, but our actual physical death can come at anytime whether we expect and/or are prepared for it or not, as people die for a wide variety of reasons. (Rom. 12:1-2)

The priest would oversee the process of burning this sacrifice just as God is there for each one of us whether we choose to serve Him or not. (Rom. 8:32-39) As you might expect, the burning of the heifer would also not be accomplished in the normal manner a sacrifice would be. It would not be just the fatty portions of the animal that would be burned, but

the entire animal. There is no instructions for dividing, skinning, or even bleeding out this animal. Other than the blood the priest would collect to sprinkle at the tabernacle, the entire animal would be burned whole! This truly represents the fact nothing of our physical bodies will go on into eternity. (Gen. 3:19) As this was done, the priest would add to the burning of the body the three elements also used in the ceremony for declaring a person clean from leprosy. These three would be cedar wood, which represents strength only God can grant; hyssop, which represents the bitterness of this life; and scarlet, which represents the shedding of blood. All these elements represent how God is here with us to save us from our sins and the misery of this life that sin causes, for He shed His own blood to show us He can grant us a new and eternal life devoid of all these things!

After this was all performed, the priest was to wash his clothes and body in water. Once he did, he could reenter the camp but would remain unclean until evening. The man who did the actual work of killing and burning this animal was to do the same. A third man, who was clean, would then gather the ashes of the heifer and put them in a special place outside the camp so they were available to be used by the congregation for purification ceremonies. After doing so, this third man was to also wash his clothes and body and be unclean until evening. The use of these ashes were to be for those both blood born in Israel as well as those who had joined the nation, and this was to be done throughout the nation's history. To use these ashes, one was to collect running water (meaning water from a river or other natural flowing source) in a vessel and put some of these ashes in the water. This water and ash combination represented both the death of an individual's body as well as the sweeping away of one's ability to commit further sin which death brings. One's willingness to go through the ceremony of using this water/ash represented one's desire to take up our cross and follow The Messiah. (Matt. 16:24-27) In doing so, we show our desire to reject this life and receive the forgiveness and continued life only God can and will grant to those who seek Him.

This is why this water was mostly to be used when a person was unclean due to touching a dead body. The person would be considered unclean for seven days, which is God's number of completion for this creation. However, following in representation of the same number of days The Messiah was tried,

killed, and rose from the dead, it was on the third day of this period the person was first to be purified with this water/ash. This was done by a clean person using hyssop to dip into the water/ash and sprinkle the unclean person. This same process was also to be repeated on the seventh day. Both our willingness to follow our Lord in this life as well as God's forgiveness on Judgment Day is represented in this process. Those willing to follow God's commandment in using this water/ash on both days were then to simply wash their clothes and body on the seventh day, and at evening they would be considered ceremoniously clean once again. If the unclean person was not willing to, or simply did not care to go through this purification on both the third and seventh day, they would not be clean on the seventh day no matter what they did. In not following the instructions of The Lord, one showed disrespect for what God offered them through the tabernacle and its ceremony, thus representative of rejecting God's salvation plan! This person would not only remain unclean, they were also to be permanently separated from the congregation of Israel and no longer considered part of the chosen nation!

This stipulation was to be accomplished even if one did not touch a dead body but was in or entered a dwelling where a person had died. Also, every open vessel that did not have a secured top or closure on it would be unclean in such a dwelling. In the open field, if anyone touched the body of a person who had been killed, or died, they would be unclean. To emphasize how much we should not attempt to preserve this life such as the Egyptian culture and others tried/try to do in mummifying a body to make it last as long as possible, Israel was to dispose of a dead body quickly. This is emphasized in the stipulation, even touching the bones of a dead person or being in a grave would cause a person to be unclean. Anyone who touched a person or item that was unclean would themselves be unclean. Dwellings, vessels, as well as people were to be sprinkled with this water in the appropriate way if they were to be clean again. Even a clean person who did the sprinkling for another, or anyone who just touched the water/ash, was to wash their clothes and be unclean until evening!

In-between the end of chapter 19 and beginning of 20 is where we see the book of Numbers take a great leap in time. Basically, the information given to us starting in chapter 15 and going through the end of 19 is the bulk of the chronological account

Numbers gives us, when it comes to the some 38 years of Israel wandering in the wilderness for the sake of allowing only the next generation to eventually enter the promised land. As chapter 20 opens, it tells us only that it was the first month of a new year for Israel, and they, once again, had come to the very same place they were in when Moses sent the spies into the promised land some 38 years earlier. Moses and Aaron's sister Miriam would die and be buried in this place, no doubt bringing some of the harshest reality to light about how this generation was not going to enter the promised land. The people overall though show how they were still very much determined to blame everything on Moses and Aaron instead of seeking God, as they became upset that there was no water in this area. It's not clear if this was due to seasonal conditions Israel did not face the first time they were here, the possibility the water had run dry in the years in-between, or the congregation had grown too large for the water there to be sufficient. It may have been a combination of things, but it upset the people so much they went so far as to claim they would have been better off if Moses and Aaron had not interceded on their part, and they would have all died when the plague from God killed thousands of their brethren years ago. They believed it would not just be them but their animals as well that would not survive this wilderness, which they would have been out of if they had followed God in going into the promised land; and even began to complain again about how this wilderness was not a place of any kind of sustainable vegetation, bringing up the standard complaint Moses shouldn't have brought them out of Egypt in the first place!

Moses and Aaron would, once again, go before the door of the tabernacle to ask God for instructions as to what to do, and God would meet them there. The answer to the problem of water would be solved as God had proven once before He could do, which was to bring water out of a rock. The difference this time would be that instead of striking the rock as Moses had been instructed to do the first time, Moses was to simply command the rock to bring forth water. Interestingly, God actually instructs Moses to specifically bring his rod in spite of the fact he was not to strike the rock with it. Moses and Aaron would gather the people before the rock; and showing his true frustration with the people by this point, Moses ends up posing a question to them basically asking if they deserved to have what God was about to miraculously

provide. Allowing this frustration to guide his actions, Moses would then strike the rock with his rod twice. The water would abundantly flow from the rock, and the people would drink of it in spite of Moses' failure to follow God's instructions in only speaking to the rock. God would reprimand Moses and Aaron for not following His instructions properly, but these words are far too often misunderstood by many people as God would tell them both they would not be the ones to lead the people into the promised land when the time came. If the stories of Israel's wandering show us anything, it is that they needed a person of Moses' character who would intercede for them and keep God's Holiness from destroying them when they doubted or rebelled. The reality had come that even as patient and caring as Moses and Aaron had been to the people, they were being pushed beyond their human limits. God would not continue to put this burden on them. This was/is a great evidence that no man of the line of Adam can save us. Only The Messiah would be able to perfectly bring us to salvation!

The verses here give us no indication Moses or Aaron protest in any way to this news. They would simply go back to the daily task of leading the people and wait for God to relieve them of their earthly burdens. (Rom. 14:7-9) This is shown in the very next verses as we see Moses sending messengers to the king of Edom; the Edomites being the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of the chosen nation's forefather Jacob. Moses approaches them with the truth they were or should be familiar with all that had happened to Jacob's line of the family, including the fact God had led them out of Egypt after years of captivity. He informs the Edomite king, Israel is just outside their territory and simply asks for permission to pass through Edom's land on their journey east around the end of the Dead Sea, where they would turn north and end up on the east side of Jordan. Moses also explains that Israel is not expecting to be treated as family or anything special. They would not eat from or damage Edom's fields, vineyards, or the like. They were not even asking to drink of their water. Israel wanted only to travel by the main trade route that would bring them through the land as any normal traveler would be expected to pass through.

The king of Edom not only did not grant them special favor in telling them they could have what they needed, or even accept what Moses was offering to do, the king would not allow them to enter his land, and

went so far as to say if Israel tried, Edom would attack them! Moses wanting to be clear, tells the king they would even pay for anything, such as water, that did get used, they only wished to pass through. The king again confirmed he would not let Israel pass through, and even sent his army to keep Israel out of the land. Thus, Israel would travel east and enough south to avoid a dispute with Edom. Though they would make it close to and eventually cross the King's Highway, which Moses wanted to use to travel north, they would continue east to get on the other side of Edom's territory. However, before making it that far east, they would travel only to a mountain range and camp at Mt. Hor. There God would tell Moses it was time for Aaron to leave this world just as God had said would happen after the water out of the rock incident. This would necessitate the High Priesthood passing to the next in Aaron's family, which was Eleazar, and demonstrate the truth God had emphasized over and over about how this family would continue to hold this position. God instructs Moses to bring both Aaron and Eleazar up into the mountain, and there Moses would remove the priestly garments from Aaron in order to put them on Eleazar. Upon doing this, Aaron would die there on top of the mountain, and Moses, with Eleazar, would return to the camp. The entire congregation would spend thirty days mourning Aaron's death; and according to later verses in Numbers, Aaron's death happened about mid year during Israel's fortieth year out of Egypt. (Num. 33:38)

The next verses illustrate why God wanted Israel to move south after they first refused to believe He could bring them into the promised land. A king at the southern end of Canaan had knowledge that many years earlier Israel had spied out the land of Canaan, and now that they were back, this king determined to take preemptive measures. The king would attack Israel, and to show Israel how much God was still not yet willing to allow them to enter the promised land, God would allow the king to take some of Israel as prisoners. This would bring about the first taste of the real battle God had sent them to do against the Canaanites. Israel turned to God in this incident and vowed if God would give them victory over this king and his people, they would be God's instruments to not just recover the prisoners but destroy all these Canaanites' cities! This, being God's will for Israel to do to most all the people when Israel was allowed to enter the promised land, God granted and gave them this victory. Israel did as they had promised in

destroying every one of the king's cities, and thus, the place was named "Hormah," which means, "a devoted place"!

This incident caused the army of Israel to go back north and west from Mt. Hor, but they still would not enter the south end of the promised land as God had originally intended them to do. Instead, the army would return to the camp, and Israel would follow the path that leads from the top of the eastern finger of the Red Sea to the south end of the Dead Sea, the southern part of which they knew all too well as later verses confirm they had been to the tip of the Red Sea in the preceding years of wandering. This irritated the people, and, once again, they would start to complain about Moses bringing them out of Egypt at all. They again claimed there was no food or water, and even added the complaint that they were tired of the manna God had been providing for them, which ensured no matter how little of their own resources they wanted to trust God to replenish, they would always have food to eat. To punish the people for this complaining, God would send poisonous snakes among them, and many of the them would die. This seemed to cause the people to understand for once, it was not Moses they were complaining to or about, but God! They admitted they had sinned in speaking against God, and they asked Moses to go before Him to take away the serpents. Moses would do so; but instead of taking the serpents away, God instructs Moses to make an image of one and put it on a pole so anyone who got bit could see it. If they were only willing to look at it, the person would not die from the bite. Moses would make the serpent out of the same metal the altar of burnt offering was covered with, which was brass; and it would be a symbol of how one day The Messiah would come in the likeness of fallen man, live in the same environment we live in, and after enduring humans punishing Him for being purely righteous, He would provide our salvation from the death this life demands we all face! (II Tim. 2:1-13)

Israel would now turn more northward going along the eastern edges of Edom. They would camp at a place named Oboth, which many maps of their journey today identify as a place much too far to the west, because after leaving there they would go to a place many maps also place too far west, but is right on the border between Edom and Moab, named Ijeabaram. The verse here in Numbers specifies this was in the wilderness area on the side of Moab facing the

rising sun, which would be to the east without a doubt. They would continue moving north, but really only to cross the river Zared, and camped again in the north side of the valley of this river that defined the border between Edom and Moab. From there Israel would move further north along the eastern border of Moab and cross over the river that divided Moab from the Amorites, before they would camp again. This is where Israel, while not entering into the part of the promised land God wanted Israel to initially settle on, did enter an area God would give to them. This is why it was/is notable that God brought Israel through the Red Sea and over the brooks and streams of Arnon. Israel's aimless years of wandering in the wilderness was coming to an end in many ways, and they were now in the area where Jacob first settled as he returned from Mesopotamia before he traveled on to the west side of Jordan and the Dead Sea.

This was also the time for Israel to turn west back toward the King's Highway that Moses wanted to use in order to travel north when he sent messengers to the king of Edom. However, they would first stop at a fairly unspecified place where God had Moses gather the people, and God provides a great well of water. This is why the place is identified simply as Beer, which means, "a well." Here the people would see God giving them a taste of the fact the promised land was truly a land flowing with milk and honey, and Israel would sing a song to commemorate the abundance of water much in the same way they sang after crossing over the Red Sea being delivered from Pharaoh's army some forty years earlier. (Ex. 14:30-15:21) It was as if the next generation of Israel was getting to experience events that would remind them of those things done for the nation right after leaving Egypt. Israel would camp in various places along the border of Moab and the Amorites before heading directly north along the King's Highway to Pisgah, which is part of the hills that were just to the south of Mt. Nebo. This brought Israel into the territory of the Amorites and very near their capital city. Here Moses would send the same message to the Amorite king named Sihon, which he had sent to Edom. This signaled Moses' intent was simply to continue traveling north. To this news Sihon would not only refuse as Edom had, but come out to destroy Israel.

Of course, God would not allow this to happen, and the time had come to start allowing Israel to obtain territory in the region. God would give Israel

a great victory over this king and his people. Israel would then take possession of all the Amorite territory from the river Arnon, where they had just come from the northern border of Moab, to the river Jabbok, which was the river where Jacob had wrestled with an angel and received the name Israel! (Gen. 32:22-30) This land would extend from the river Jordan on the west to the border of Ammon on the east. What this did was give Israel a piece of land that had been occupied by true Canaanite people, descendent from Noah's son Ham, without disturbing the Edomites who descended from Jacob's brother Esau, or the Ammonites and Moabites who were descendent from Abraham's nephew Lot. Israel would not destroy the cities but inhabit them, including the capital Sihon had established and used to originally take most of this land from the Moabites, of which there was an entire parable about. Thus, God had used Israel to exact revenge - so to speak - on the Canaanites, and prove to Israel's related people how much God was truly with Israel.

The driving out and destruction of the Canaanite people had begun, but it would not end there just because Israel had not yet crossed over Jordan. Moses would send spies further north into the land held by more Amorites who were not under king Sihon. The villages of these Amorites, Israel would also take by driving the people out. Israel would continue into the land of Bashan, which is so far north it lays to the east and extends north of the Sea of Chinnereth: better known to most Bible students as the Sea of Galilee! This land had a king named Og who came out to fight with Israel as they moved on north, but God told Moses not to fear them because He would give Israel the victory over this king, his people, and land just as God had Sihon. Again, we see an example of God using Israel to bring judgment upon these people, as Israel did not just drive them out but killed them all in battle and possessed their land as well!

Let's stay in God's Word!

